

To start off the sermon this morning, let me open us up in prayer:

Lord Jesus, help us hear your call in our lives, and when we hear, help us say yes. Give us the grace to see the tasks to which you call us as your disciples. Then give us the gifts we need to accomplish these tasks for you.

We marvel that you have placed us within your inbreaking kingdom. At times, we feel inadequate, unequal to your vocation of us. Nevertheless, help us delight in your will, walk in your way, and enjoy the privilege of serving you in this time and place. Amen.

The journey continues. As I have mentioned numerous times, Mark is all about the journey that Jesus is on and the disciples are following him. It has been an unbelievable journey. At each turn and curve, the disciples are learning and are also struggling along the way. There is a new story at every twist and turn; that we get to listen into.

Like many journey's, those who embark on the journey do not know where the way leads or where the road will end. The same is true for us today. We are on a journey. As individuals and as a congregation; we are uncertain on where this journey will take us.

Let us once again step into the journey that Mark is taking us on and see what we can learn that may help us on our journey. I am not sure about you, but I know that I could benefit from learning lesson on life.

The story that we read today seems so simple on the surface. James and John seem to ask to be his left- and right-hand man and Jesus says no. Right? It is so simple.

In the past, I have seen this as a simple story. I mean, it is so easy to jump on James and John and shower them with criticism. However, this week, I wanted to take a deeper look and see what I may have been missing all these years.

So, I began to wonder. A few weeks ago, earlier in the disciples' journey, we saw Jesus telling them: *"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."* And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them." I mean, is it possible that they were just being like children and being bold and asking for what they want?

However, my mind then began to think about the squabble that the disciples had while they were on their journey. Do you remember their bickering? They were trying to decide who would be the greatest.

In those passages, I shared with you that it seems to be about Jesus dismantling the **division** of the insiders and outsiders. I want you to hold onto that word – division – for a minute. Because I then reread the passage and another word jumped off the page to me. Here is the sentence and the word.

When the ten heard about this, they became **indignant** with James and John. Indignant is the word that Eugene Peterson uses to translate their feelings and it is a good word choice, in my opinion. The definition of indignant is feeling or showing anger or annoyance at what is perceived as unfair treatment:

So, I had these two words swirling around in my head. Division and Anger. We are seeing so much of this now-a-days. It seems that anger is the driving force to the division that we are seeing. Unfortunately, the division is not just staying out there but it is seeping into churches at an alarming rate.

I think that Jesus was sensing the anger in the ten disciples. They were not happy about James and John request. I believe that Jesus knew that this anger had the potential to divide them. Thus, Jesus addresses the anger head on.

Many of you know that I love sports. A coach, if he is good, is very wise on the calling of timeouts. I think that this is especially true in basketball where the coach needs to change the momentum. The coach calls a time out and the team gathers in a tight circle and instruction is given to alter the current direction. I share that with you, because I see that in our text. Jesus calls a Timeout and brings the disciples in.

If you don't believe me, check out verse 42. It states: Jesus called them together and instructs.

His words are shared in verses 43 and 44:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

Servant and Slave.

That is what Jesus is calling them into.

The servant and the slave language when you boil it down is that we are being called to be like Jesus and follow Jesus. We are to give our everything in expressing God's love for the whole world.

This challenge comes to us every time we celebrate the sacraments of baptism and communion. Then, more importantly, Jesus is extravagantly forgiving of our stumbling efforts.

Our anger and our division are part of our stumbling efforts. We must continue on this journey that Jesus calls us into. As long as we continue on the journey and come to the table and celebrate the bread and wine, Jesus is there.

Remember, Jesus and the disciples are on a journey. Their journey is going to end at the cross. That is not where they were expecting the journey to end. Jesus showed us the slave and the servant mentality. He gave his life as a ransom.

So, here we are. Many of us, still today, are holding onto bitterness, hostility, and violence and you know what? Jesus hands himself over, so we can be set free.

Let it go.

Release all the anger, division, bitterness and hostility that is inside you and let it be filled with God's love, mercy and grace.

Follow Jesus.

When you make that decision and you are bold enough to follow him recklessly; giving ourselves entirely to others; there may be naysayers like the ten disciples were being to James and John. Jesus will affirm you and encourage you to ignore those who are being critical of you and continue to follow Jesus with the best of your ability.

Here is the thing. The naysayers and those being critical are usually the individuals on the same team. They may even be in the same pew.

We come back to the sacrament. We have to cling up to it. Many churches have a round alter. When I served at Bethany-Elim, we had a round alter rail. The thing that I loved about it was there was no left or no right. No matter how many individuals who were at church on Sunday and came to the alter there always was room for one more as I moved around the circle.

Each and every person that comes to the table hears the same words. The body of Christ broken for you. When you come to the table, you are forgiven and receive the challenge to go out and follow Jesus through service by being a servant.

Let me conclude this sermon by some words from Will Willimon.

When we take up the cross and follow Jesus, he will take us places. The disciplines of discipleship: daily prayer, Bible reading, worship, service, evangelism, and witness; they form us while we practice them. In the very acts required to follow Jesus, we become transformed.

I know that when you hear the disciplines, you may tend to see and hear them as a check list and give a deep sigh because you have failed. So, in my ultimate, true closing; hear this final sentence:

We don't master discipleship; rather discipleship involves a willingness to let the Master have his way with our lives.

Amen.