
Mark 10:32-45 Second reading Isaiah 53:10-12

James tells about his mistake

T [Last week we saw how Jesus was getting ready for his suffering. But he had spoken about it earlier on, as we will hear from James. James is speaking after cross and resurrection. Verse numbers in brackets.]

My name is James. I am a leading disciple, an apprentice of Jesus, with my brother John. I was called first; well, apart from Peter, but he is unsuitable.

I have a confession to make. I made a mistake. Jesus was speaking about suffering again. [33-34] I didn't understand these things, nor did my brother. We thought he was predicting his kingdom; that he was saying that the fight with the Romans would be tough, bloody, but that he would soon be on the throne in Jerusalem.

So the two of us, my brother and myself, we went to Jesus and asked for leading positions in his kingdom. Simple; we thought we were worth it. After all, we had given up everything. We once had a thriving fishing business in Galilee, you know. And we had been witnesses of his transfiguration, so we were leading apprentices. So we asked to sit at his right and left hand. [35-37] In your language, we asked to be allowed to move into number 11.

Jesus did not respond immediately. Instead he asked one of his cryptic questions:

'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?' [38]

We, of course, said 'Yes, we can.' We are good followers. We are much more faithful than that Peter, after all.

But then Jesus disappointed us: 'To sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.' [40]

Ouch. And then the other apprentices got angry with us. We had a big fall-out. [41]

This happened some weeks ago. It was only after his crucifixion that I understood what Jesus had meant. John and I wanted to sit at his right and at his left hand in his palace. But when he was crucified, they hung a criminal at his left and one at his right hand. [15:27] Oops, that was obviously not our intention! So if we had totally shared in his fate, we would have been tortured and killed with him!

In his answer, Jesus spoke about his baptism, again with some puzzling words. Listen: 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with.' [39]

Of course I thought he was going to be baptised again, literally, and so thought John. But he must have meant his death. He went under in the waters of death. In that way he could forgive our sins – for he himself had no sins to die for. That means that we, his apprentices, must now also be baptised, deep into the waters of death, to represent our unity with him.

Jesus then said some things which sounded general, but were clearly directed at us:

'You know that rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to

become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.' [42-44]

I now think that this means that he wants us to begin as servants. At that time I really thought this was a shame. I still find it so difficult to accept!

And he went on, calling himself 'Son of man' again: 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' [45]

I've thought about these words ever since. It is probably the deepest I heard from him. He spoke about a ransom, the payment made to free a slave or a criminal or a prisoner: 'For ... the Son of Man [came] to give his life as a ransom for many.'

That probably means that his death was for a purpose: to set people free. Oops, that makes me and John and the others slaves who needed liberation. But the good news is: he liberated us! That's how much he loved us.

And he said: 'a ransom for many'. Who else does he mean? All our nation? Including those Pharisees and Sadducees? Other peoples? Probably. After all, I now realise that he is God's representative. And God seems to have a rather inclusive agenda.

So let me think again. What again is a ransom? The price of a slave or a criminal. Jesus has now given his life. It seems like this was a self-sacrifice. But 'for many'? Will that include non-Jews? Wait, this reminds me of our Scriptures! Of Isaiah 53. Here it is:

'... the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.'

'For he bore the sin of many' [53:10, 12]

So Jesus in fact claimed that he was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah about the Servant of the Lord. Ah! Jesus is the Servant who came to take away the sins of God's people and to serve them instead of lording over them. Wow!

I now see that John and I were blind when we asked our question. We now know better. And the words of Jesus help me to understand his death on the cross. The cross was not a short intermezzo to get Jesus on the throne, but he took it on purpose. He wanted it, to pay the ransom for us.

At first, of course, we did not understand at all why he was captured and put on trial and killed. We thought all was lost. But now I see it: he gave his life as a ransom for me. His death sets me free. He forgives my sin.

And now that he is king, after his resurrection, in his kingdom it is not about positions of glory and honour, it's about serving. I may even need to serve that awkward guy Peter..., and my little brother John... Hm...

I was a bit silly to ask for a leading position. I must simply serve, like Jesus served.

Enjoy the rest of your day!
