

Holy Communion St. Paul's Cathedral Church Kamloops
Territory of the People Regional Gatherings
October 17, 2021
The 21st Sunday After Pentecost Year B

Gospel: Mark 10:35-45

Sermon by Rt. Rev. Lynne McNaughton, Archbishop and Metropolitan

26:30

“And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be delightful in your sight, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

At the Council of General Synod in our zoom meeting in May, just last spring, we had several Anglicans from across the country talk about the racism they have experienced in the church. And it was horrifying because it wasn't things that happened in the past. It is things that are happening now.

When one Indigenous woman said that every time she sees a bishop sitting on their throne she thinks, “Colonization.”

So now I have trouble, sitting.

(facing Archbishop Mark MacDonald) Thank you for leaning on that chair!

I have a great deal of difficulty sitting in that chair . . .

What it symbolizes for some people, maybe for all of us, certainly for me, now, is a symbol of colonization.

And I suspect it's no consolation that, especially in Kootenay, when the Bishop's chairs are lovely, handmade, hard wood and very uncomfortable to sit in, at least this one has a cushion.

But it's a symbol of the office of bishop and I see that office as a relationship between the parish community church I'm with on whatever day I'm with them as a symbol of the whole worldwide Anglican Communion.

But why on earth would we ever call it a throne?

Jesus would shake his head!

Just as, I'm sure, he was shaking his head when James and John made their request to sit on his right hand and on his left.

No, says Jesus. It's not about power or privilege.

Yesterday was a powerful day, a gathering of the Territory with Archbishop Mark MacDonald opening for us, I think, a new way that Indigenous governance, the self-determination of the Indigenous Church, offers a way of hope for the whole Anglican Church in terms of our structure: structure and governance based on relationship and based on the Holy Spirit.

The two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, the Sons of Thunder, make the request to Jesus for the privileged places, and they make it immediately after Jesus has predicted his own suffering and death! Mark puts those together just to emphasize the disciples don't get it.

One of my favourite scholars on Mark says don't call them passion predictions but interpretations of the messiah's servant mission: the Cross.

Do we get it?

No.

Jesus has been teaching the disciples to organize their structure, the new community in Christ. He's looking at governance.

And what criteria does Jesus have for a community to rule itself, and the criteria for leadership in that new community?

Servanthood.

The literal question is who should sit on the left and right side; the theological question is who sits in the places of power? Who sits with Jesus in the Kingdom?

What's ironic in the Gospel of Mark is the only ones who end up on Jesus's right hand and left hand are the two bandits who are beside Jesus on the cross.

In Mark's gospel, the apostles are meant to be the leaders, the main models of disciples; but they are very flawed human beings.

Are the criteria for being a follower of Jesus, being a disciple, still our criteria for being disciples?

Are we able to drink the cup he drinks?

Are we able to undergo the baptism that Jesus undergoes?

Yes! Yes, says James and John.

Yes! say we.

Surprisingly, Jesus says to them, yes, you will indeed, you will indeed drink the cup that Jesus drinks: the cross.

And none of us know what we sign up for when we sign up for that. Even if we don't consciously—and I'm not talking just about bishops here, I'm talking about all of us as disciples—even if we don't consciously sign up and set out for glory; even if we think we understand that it means servanthood and the cross, in theory we don't know what shape that cross will take.

What does our servanthood leadership look like?

James and John really have no idea what they're getting themselves into. And like many, most, covenant relationships, it's probably just as well that we enter into it not knowing all of it, what it will entail.

By the time that Mark--the gospel of Mark--is written, James will already have been killed by Herod because James was the leader in the Jerusalem church. John, James's brother John, we think, died in his bed after a long life.

But the cross is not just literal martyrdom, but for most of us, day by day by day, taking up our cross, giving up our time and our energy, and our privileges in order to serve others.

The baptized, who have drunk the cup that Jesus drank--
the horror of the children who died in residential schools and who were not afforded human dignity and proper burial, not afforded the reverent treatment of their bodies because of the structures and powers of domination--
the cross was thrust upon them because of unjust structures.

How do we keep this gospel in mind?

We are entering now, in the Territory of the People, a discernment about the next bishop. We did, on Friday night, with Coordinating Council, all of the motions which will enable that process to move forward according to the constitutions of the Territory.

How do we enter into that kind of discernment?

Here's my caution: we want leaders to fix things, but it's not possible.
Even God does not "fix things" the way we would like God to fix them.
God accompanies us through our wilderness wandering.
And I see that as the role of the bishop: the shepherd that walks with and guides, accompanies, through the wilderness.

Bishops take vows to be guardians of the Faith. And as one of my predecessors, Michael Ingham, said, "That does not mean 'museum curator'".

And it is guardian of the faith, not the structures, not the institution.

I think it's one of the roles of the bishops as leader, and all of you as disciples, to ensure that structures, the structures of the church are called to serve people—not people serving the structures. And it's hard to do that when you have a funny hat on your head and when you carry things like this [indicates crozier].

Yes. How do we keep in mind the servanthood?

Archbishop Mark reminded us . . . (I have to keep saying Archbishop Mark or Mark the Gospel writer today!), Archbishop Mark reminded us yesterday that when two or three are gathered together, when two or three disciples create a community, we are the church.

And we walk into training leaders for the church with Bible and history and theology and pastoral care and evangelism and mission and leadership. It is impossible for one person to have all of those skills needed for leadership. There has to be a team. And I saw the team at work yesterday--Margaret and Len and Melissa and Angus and Jo Ann and all of your leaders. There was a strong sense of team all over the Territory.

And one of the strengths that you have in the Territory, and have had for decades, is the freedom to experiment with structure and governance, to ask how does the leadership structure serve God's mission? Lay Ministers of Word and Sacrament: a way of building team and shifting, shifting the structure.

God's dominion is different than other dominions.

Jesus says the Gentiles, i.e. the people outside of the community of faith, lord it over, rely on coercion or control, self-interest or self protection. For example, Herod killing James or killing John the Baptist. The authority of tyrants, the authority used for selfish gain rather than the kind of authority Jesus has, for example.

In James's gospel, Jesus has the authority to build up people, authority to free people, authority to restore people to community, authority to forgive; authority to cast out demons, authority to heal. Jesus redefines authority: to be great is to be the servant of all.

Servant; diaconate; deacons; and then Jesus pushes it even further to "douclos"— slave, the slave of all. So, it's not about honour and glory. It is not the way the world understands greatness.

Walter Wink, in his amazing series of books on the principalities and powers, the unintended consequences that arise out of human systems, Walter Wink talks about the system of domination, where some human beings have power over others, some coerce or control or boss or bully.

Jesus is setting out for his community an alternative system to the domination system—structures based on relationship, of serving one another and serving the world God loves.

How do we create structures that serve human beings and serve creation?
It's not service to the structure, not the institutional church.

How do we ensure that the institution serves Christ, that it cares for others not for the institution?
Part of that I think is that we have to see our mission at the edge of things, not the centre - who's marginalized? who's on the edge or been pushed out? serving those people.

It's a call to a radical renunciation of power and privilege.

One of the Mark scholars that I really like, Matt Skinner, says that we need to hear what Jesus says right at the end of this gospel: "the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life, a ransom for many."

What Matt Skinner says is not to get carried away with the ransom in terms of the forgiveness of sin and all the atonement theories that we've built up over a couple of thousand years, but that the word 'ransom' in this context of domination means the liberation that God brings—kind of bringing us out of slavery to the systems of oppression. So Jesus sees us as held captive by the domination system, captivity to that power where we want power. That's what the disciples were wrestling with: the temptation and the lure of power that ensnares all of us.

Jesus saying I've come as a ransom, means Jesus coming to liberate us from being ensnared by the desire for power.

Also that it may not mean that they were after sitting at the left and the right hand of Jesus. They'd just heard from Jesus that he was heading towards the cross and do you know what they're worried about?

Their future.

Just like the church now.

Being anxious to secure a future will get in the way of us changing the structures to be what we need to be as church.

Our security in the future lies in God, not in having something that worked in the 1950's or that worked in the 16th century.

Our security in the future lies in God and in that freedom, Jesus has set us free, ransomed us from being ensnared by power and domination.

How do we as a church live into that?

Not just our leaders and those we put funny hats on, but our entire church.

How do we keep hearing that call of Jesus to be the servant of all?

Amen.