

On October 21, 2012, Seminarian Nelson Grigg preached this sermon at Christ Church.

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

Pentecost 21 – Cycle B: Mark 10: 35 - 45

On Tuesday of this week, I met with Pastor James in order to go over my first draft of this sermon when he officially announced that I was his new 'Sermon Buddy'. I was naturally quite honoured because when I entered his office I had assumed that the relationship was one of student and supervisor when it came to the Sermon Methodology part of my training; but then he came up with this 'Sermon Buddy' relational term. So does this mean that before you give your sermons I am going to be able to discuss your work? Yes. I guess the boundaries and dynamics of this 'Sermon Buddy' relationship have become reciprocal now.

As I was saying, when we met the other day we discussed the Gospel and he showed me how James and John were both seeking the power of being at the left and right of Jesus. In the time of Jesus and even today the seating positions at a table were very symbolic and held a great significance especially at banquets and feasts. Usually the head of the household or the host would sit at the head of the table with the most honoured guest at the right hand and the next-most-honoured guest on the left. How arrogant of James and John to ask this of Jesus! After all, in Mark 9, it is James, John and Peter who were the only three disciples asked by Jesus to witness the Transfiguration. Why would they feel they needed to ask this of Jesus? This bold request of James and John may be the result of their insecurity and the powerlessness they may have felt because in the two previous verses in Mark 10, Jesus takes the twelve disciples aside and says to them that he will be betrayed and killed. They may have been worried about their future and their position with Jesus going forward.

There was something else Jesus said that should have also made them a little nervous ... He said, "You don't know what you are asking." James and John said they would be able to drink from the cup that Jesus drinks from and be Baptized as Jesus was baptized; but they didn't realize that what Jesus was saying was that in order for James and John to truly be with Jesus on the Last Day, they would also have to die. In fact Jesus says to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with." Jesus was foretelling that James and John, as with all of the people of God, will someday be with Jesus. It is interesting to note that James died a martyr proclaiming the Good News of Christ and John died in exile on the Greek island of Patmos.

The last part of the reading is a common theme for Jesus with his view on the hierarchies of Rome and the Gentiles. Jesus said to all of the disciples that whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. He was trying to teach them that the reign of God isn't a hierarchy like the one in Rome with the ruling few on top and the rest by rank underneath. In fact, it is the other way around where they must be the ones who serve. Jesus was not born to be served, but to serve, and in doing so he gave his life for the sins of all of us. The death of Jesus on the cross is the very powerful message of salvation that breaks our hearts because the disciples were powerless to stop the pain and suffering Jesus had to endure.

In our world there are many examples of Power.

We know the Power of Prime Ministers and Presidents.

We know the Power of the military and the dictator.

We know the Power of corporations and big business.

Unfortunately, in our world today there are far too many examples of powerlessness.

We know the Powerlessness of poverty and hunger.

We know the Powerlessness of those who are homeless and unemployed.

We know the Powerlessness of those who are oppressed and helpless.

Today, in this church and this community of believers there is power in all of us to love and care and serve.

It is wonderful to see that the people of Christ Lutheran are serving the needs of the hungry and homeless in the Out of the Cold program.

It is fantastic to see this congregation serve the sick with the Prayer Shawl ministry.

It is marvellous to see this church offer their facility to serve the children in the after-school programme.

It is heart-warming to see this church serve the group of gardeners who tend to the fruits and vegetables in the Community garden.

Martin Luther taught that salvation is not earned by good deeds, but received only as a free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He also believed that God's call to serve is answered in the structures of everyday life as worker, volunteer, family member, citizen, and even what we call 'free time'. We need to serve at the soup kitchen. We need to volunteer at the food bank and at the Out of the Cold programme, not to be able to say to everyone look at me and look at all the good things I do; but rather to use our power of loving, caring, and serving – use it not so that we can say to God look at all the good works I am doing down here on earth so that on the judgement day you will look on me with favour. We serve one another because we are called to do so by the life, ministry, and death of Jesus: we are servant disciples of the Servant Master.

I believe we were born to do two things: we were born first to serve God and second to serve each other. In fact, when we are serving others we are also serving God.

Because of Jesus, our serving looks like many things: compassion, support, advocacy, mercy, and forgiveness for one another; working for peace in our homes, community, and world; insisting on justice in every aspect of our life together.

God's only son was born not to be served but to serve.

May God give us the power to serve the powerless with all our heart, through Jesus Christ who gave his life as a ransom for many.