



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
10-21-12

Talk about BOLD before the Son of God!! “Jesus, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” What chutzpah – maybe even arrogance. “Do for us whatever we ask of you. Although I suppose if we’re honest with ourselves, many of us might want to say the same thing with God.

And perhaps some of us do join with James and John in approaching God with boldness and directly. You might remember the request of Brandi. She finds herself in dire trouble because her business is failing and the debts are piling up, so she decides to ask God for help. So she prays, God, you got to help me. I’ve lost my business and if I don’t get some money, I’m going to lose my house as well. Let me win the lottery this weekend. Saturday night drawing comes and goes and someone else wins. So Brandi goes back with her request. Come on God, I need your help. This week has been even worse and the children are getting upset and hungry and I’ve got to win the lottery. Again, Saturday night’s drawing is held and Brandi doesn’t win. So she begins to whine – God, why aren’t you answering? I’m a good person and I need your help. I need to win the lottery and have the money to get my life back in order. Suddenly, there is a blinding flash of light as the heavens open and Brandi hears the voice of God. “Brandi, you have to meet me halfway on this.... You have to buy a lottery ticket.”

So Brandi finds out what happens when you take your requests to God. As do James and John. And do does Job – if you’ve been following the Job readings or have read the book of Job before. Job has been demanding a response from God and he gets one. And in every instance, Brandi, Job, James and John – God lets them know that there is a two way street in this relationship. You can demand but God is going to engage you in a conversation about it. You are going to invest some of yourself or you are going to go deeper and learn more about God. There is nothing one way about taking your request to God.

So, Jesus starts out by asking James and John what it is they want. Can you imagine Jesus asking you what you want? It is the same question that Jesus will ask of blind Bartemaus next week and he asks to receive his sight. Every time I read either of these passages, I think, how cool is that? Jesus asking what you want? And it is interesting for me to take the time to imagine what I would answer – maybe you do also – health, money, security of some sort, wisdom, some wonderful personality – usually I think about myself when I formulate my answer – much like James and John. But you know, God’s relationship is with the church as much as it is with individuals – so I wonder how might we answer that question today – for St. Andrew’s.

What is it that you want here? How would you answer? And I suggest that it is worthwhile to give the answer some thought. What you would ask for for St. Andrew's can become a starting point for polishing our mission and our identity and our vision and our prayers.

We can see that God does indeed listen to James and John and responds. They tell him about wishing to sit on each side of him in heaven. And he asks if they can drink from the cup and share in the same baptism as he. And boldly the two answer yes.

Then Jesus agrees with them, that indeed they will drink from the cup with him and share in his baptism. In Hebrew scriptures, to drink from the same cup was to share in the same joys and sorrows. To share in the same baptism was to share in both life and death.

So, Jesus let them know that what he will share with them is a lifetime of joys and sorrows, and a life and death. And that's what he offers them is response to their question. He does not grant their request of where they will get to sit in their life after death. His response in affirming their bold request was that they will indeed be joining with Christ in living a life with him – a life of servanthood.

This will be a life rich in joys and sorrows, and James and John are thought to have suffered deaths of martyrdom, similar deaths to the death of Jesus. So, in coming to Jesus with their prayers, with their interests, with their hopes and desires, Jesus responded to them with an intimate relationship of love and sharing and caring for others.

It is all right for us, perhaps even good for us to be bold in our requests and consider what it is we want from Jesus. And then we listen for the response back from Him. He'll probably say to us, just like he said to James and John – are you ready to share a life with me? And if we say yes, why then the answer to our prayers is underway. And if our request involves life after death, well it appears we will have to wait to learn that answer.

Thanks be to God.