

## Mark 10:35-45

*James and John ask Jesus to be allowed to sit at his right and left when Jesus enters glory. Then after assuring them that they will share in his suffering, Jesus teaches all the disciples that those who want to be great among his disciples must be the servant of all, just as Jesus came to serve and not be served.*

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

In Ch 8, Jesus cures a blind man at Bethsaida. Then Peter’s declaration, and Jesus’ first announcement of his impending death. But Peter doesn’t get it and rebukes Jesus. Then, in Ch 9, Jesus repeats his declaration that he will die in Jerusalem, a pronouncement that terrifies his disciples into silence... until they begin arguing with each other about who is the greatest. Jesus’ words take time to sink in, so he puts before them a child and tells them that leadership and greatness are about welcoming the vulnerable. Now, in Ch 10, Jesus says once more - in verses just before our reading – that he is going to Jerusalem to die. And, again, the disciples don’t get it. James and John ask for special places of honour and then the rest of the disciples resent their self-interested pushiness. As plainly and clearly as possible Jesus says that to be great is to serve others and that to be first is to be last. And then comes another healing of a blind man, Bartimaeus.

These healings of blindness bracket Jesus’ three pronouncements of his impending death, the disciples’ failure to understand, and Jesus ongoing teaching about what constitutes greatness.

## COCU61B Readings

In the Lectionary this week we encounter God’s greatness as God questions Job, but we are also faced with the greatness of the suffering servant who is persecuted and suffers for the sake of others. We see God’s glory revealed in creation, but we also encounter God’s glory in God’s compassionate rescue of those who cry out to God. We recognise the greatness of Jesus whom God has appointed as a high priest because he journeyed through suffering and is able to offer salvation. And we learn that those who are great in God’s Reign are those who are willing to be the servants of all – just as Jesus came not to be served but to serve. The contrast between the God of creation and the suffering servant Jesus is a powerful way for the Lectionary to address the question of greatness. God has all the power and glory that the name implies, but even God does not express God’s greatness in domination and conquest. Rather, in the incarnation, God’s glory and greatness are revealed through humility, service and the embrace of suffering. For those who seek greatness, we must expect that the same should be true for us – and this is exactly what Jesus taught. The challenge for us this week is to decide whether we can find the courage to define greatness in this way, and, if we can, to live as “great ones” in God’s Reign.

It’s amazing and encouraging that, in this world obsessed with adversarial political discourse and the allure of fame and wealth, we still honour those who give themselves sacrificially in service of others. It is not the leaders who use their power for their own aggrandisement that we truly honour. It’s not the corporate executives that amass huge fortunes that really impress us. It’s not the celebrities that get addicted to their own fame and influence that inspire us. It’s those who, having reached a position in which they could use their influence and resources for personal benefit, lay it all aside in service of the greater good. These are the ones who bring the greatest healing to the world. What is desperately needed in our world is a culture of “greatness” that celebrates self-giving, humility, service and small acts of contribution to the greater good. The creation of this culture starts with us when we choose not to get caught up in the hype over the latest celebrity or movement, but to embrace and celebrate the humble, serving people around us. In addition, when we use our vote and our contributions to reward humility, service and sacrifice, rather than accumulation, hubris and power-mongering, we can make a significant difference to the way our world works.

*(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

**Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c**

*In praise of God's glory and majesty, for the way God established the earth and commanded the waters, and for the way God has filled the earth with God's creation.*

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

**O Lord my God, you are very great.**

You are clothed with honour and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.

**You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken.**

You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth.

**O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Praise the Lord!****Job 38:1-7, (34-41 optional - not included here)**

*God answers Job, questioning where he was when God created the earth, who orders the clouds and lightning and can create rain, and who provides food for wild animals and birds.*

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"

**Hebrews 5:1-10**

*High priests offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the people and deals with them gently, because he is aware of his own weakness. In the same way, Jesus was appointed by God, and offered prayer for his life to God, who saved him. Now he offers salvation to those who trust him.*

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

**Where are all the leaders** *(John van de Laar)*

There are so many people of influence in our world, Jesus, Those with loud voices and deep pockets, those with large lives and wide networks.

But, where are the leaders?

As we struggle to keep our broken humanity from splintering into countless irreparable fragments;

As we wrestle with our greed and arrogance, our ignorance and short-sightedness, our violence and coldness, our carelessness and narcissism,

Where are the leaders?

Raise up for us, O God, leaders worthy of the name, men and women who like Christ are unafraid of challenge, unashamed of serving,

and unattached to their own personal gain;

men and women who like Christ call to the best within us, and then lead the way.

And, in our own small spheres, God, may we be the leaders we seek. Amen.