

This passage which we are about to read from the 10th chapter of Mark describes a journey that some people are having with Jesus. This crowd is walking with Jesus and they are on the way to Jerusalem. The crowd has witnessed many things that Jesus has done. And now I invite us to read Mark 10:32-45 to catch a glimpse of how they are reacting to what they are seeing.

Read Mark 10:32-45

Did you catch at the beginning of this passage what the crowd is feeling as they are following Jesus? They are both amazed and they are afraid. They are amazed and they are afraid.

This is the third time in the gospel of Mark that Jesus announces what is going to happen to him in Jerusalem. And each time the disciples can't figure out what this means. The first time that Jesus tells them that he will face persecution and death in Jerusalem, Peter rebukes him. Peter tells Jesus that there is no way that strength can come through the weakness of a cross.

The second time Jesus discloses that he will face persecution and death in Jerusalem, the disciples respond by debating who will be the greatest. Jesus then scoops up a child into his arms and tells them that greatness rests not in great deeds but in receiving and welcoming a child.

And now we move to today's reading which is the third time in the gospel of Mark that Jesus says what is going to happen in Jerusalem. Jesus says he will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, they will condemn him to death, they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise again. And you wonder why people are afraid.

My experience with being a Christian is this. Sometimes it is amazing. It is amazing when we have an experience in worship like what happened here last week. Last week's Scripture lesson from James included a call from James that if one is sick they can call upon the elders to gather together, lay hands on the person, and anoint them with oil.

We who were in worship last week heard a testimony from Cathy Fox who read through a Facebook posting that we were offering prayers in worship and the opportunity to be anointed with oil. Cathy shared about how 9 years ago after her diagnosis with a brain tumor when she was given months to live she came to this church for a worship service in which we prayed over her and anointed her with oil. Last week in worship she shared her powerful testimony of how important that blessing was to her and that although it has been a tough 9 years she is thankful for this Christian community and our belief in the power of prayer and healing.

It is amazing that a television reporter spent 4 hours here on Wednesday in order to gather enough material for two stories that will air at some point in the future on CN2 in Rock Hill. One, a story about three retired guys who come into this church building most every week to repair and restore old computers that they donate to students here in York County and now to Liberia.

The second story, of course, that brought this reporter here was the story of how a graveyard in these woods over here with the remains of African-Americans who were considered no more than property and how their descendants moved to Liberia and how our two communities are reconnected to one another to do ministry together. When members of this church began restoring that graveyard 10 years ago none of us could have imagined that restoring that sacred ground would lead to computers finding their way to school children in Africa. Like the people following Jesus in the story we read, sometimes following Jesus is amazing.

But the passage we read also says that the people following Jesus are afraid. And if we are honest with ourselves, sometimes we don't fully commit to following Jesus because we are scared by what that will mean to us. Sometimes following Jesus means challenging the way we live and the expectations for our lives.

When Wil Willimon was a campus minister at Duke University, a fellow campus minister asked him to participate in a baptism of a graduate student. The grad student was from China. He had been attracted to the Christian faith while a student at Duke. Willimon says he had met him once or twice before.

Well, Willimon joyfully participated in the baptism of the student. And he thought it a bright idea to bring his camera and take a few pictures after the baptism. "You can send these pictures to your family back in China," Willimon said to the student. "You can share your baptism day with your friends at home," he said as he maneuvered everyone into place for the snapshots.

Willimon noticed that the group looked a little shy and awkward, but they all stood together as he took his pictures. After the baptism the other campus minister said to Willimon, "Oh, that was embarrassing, you with your camera and all."

"Embarrassing? Why?" Willimon asked.

"Well, because now that he's baptized, his life has been ruined. His parents say that they will disinherit him. The government will probably take away his scholarship. He can't show those pictures to anybody back home. His life as he knew it is over; he's been baptized into Jesus."

Following Jesus leads us both amazed and it leads us to be afraid. And like James and John and the rest of the disciples we may want to be treated special and not have to be like everyone else. Like James and John and all of the disciples, we may want a special place next to Jesus. We want our faith in Jesus to take away any uncertainty in our lives. But Jesus says it does not work like that. Jesus says that if any of you want to become great then you must become a servant.

Today you are electing a group of folks to serve on Session. This passage speaks to them but I think it speaks to all of us. To be a leader in the Christian community is not to be someone seeking a place of prominence. To be a leader in the church is not about asking to be treated special by others. To be a leader according to Jesus is to be a servant. For Jesus came not to be served but to serve. For us to follow Jesus is not to seek to be served but to serve others.

But living out our calling to service does not just occur in this institution that we call the church. To follow Christ closely means that wherever we find ourselves we are serving others. So that whether we spend our days teaching, raising children, managing a business, doing stuff in front of a computer, being educated, managing others, volunteering, working in an office, working outside, what we do does not matter as much as how we do it.

And whatever we do we are called to be a servant. That is what being a faithful follower is all about. Serving.

Following Jesus may lead to a call to sacrifice. Following Jesus does not protect us from being afraid. There are times when following Jesus may leave us afraid. But there are times when following Jesus may leave us amazed. Really amazed.
AMEN.



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-Mckensie, Alyce, <http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Stupid-Disciple-Tricks-Alyce-McKenzie-10-18-2012.html>

-Willimon, Wil, http://day1.org/1474-good_news

-Given: October 21, 2012 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)