

Choosing Our Future

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Martyn Minns

Mark 10:35–45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. ³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” ³⁸ “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” ³⁹ “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.” ⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve!”

How about you? Have you come here today to serve or to be served? Have you come to give or to get? Have you come to feed others or to be fed?

If this were a restaurant would you see yourself sitting at the table waiting for someone to serve you, or would you be standing at the table waiting to serve others?

“To serve or to be served?”

This is not simply a question for this morning, but it has to do with our fundamental approach to life. Most of us have grown up in a Western Culture where we have been conditioned to think of ourselves as consumers—we have been born to shop! It starts in early childhood when we all want to have the same toy or bicycle or, these days a computer, as everyone else.

Joshua, our five year old grandson, is not only picky about the computer he uses, but even which website he wants to access! A year ago it was barney.com, but now he’s moved onto video conferencing with a friend in Scotland! As we get older, our toys become more expensive and it is not just the stuff that we want, but also the lifestyle that they promote. It is insidious because it appeals to the very self-centeredness that underscores so many of our struggles today. That is why these words of Jesus are such a challenge, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

To serve or be served?

The good news is that there are hundreds of people who come here week after week to serve. Did you know that it takes more than 220 people to “do” Saturday night and Sunday mornings at Truro? I didn’t until I started counting all of the faithful people who come to meet and greet, staff our education programs, sing in the choirs, lead music, prepare the altar, count the offering, etc., at our four weekend services. That doesn’t include the hundreds more who serve during the week. But serving isn’t just about getting ready for church it is intended to be a way of life.

Today we have reached the final week of our 40 “Days of Discernment” adventure. The topic for Week 6 is “Choosing our Future.” In a few minutes you will be hearing from Jim Oakes about some of the practical steps that we will be following as we seek to discern the Lord’s will for this church. It is a huge decision with far reaching consequences. Before we get to that point, however, I would like to ask a rather different question. Not, “What will be our new alignment or denominational brand name?” but rather,

- What will be our essential identity?
- What will be the character of our community?

For a long time the Episcopal Church has been identified as the church of power, prestige and impeccable taste. After all we are the church of the founding fathers of this great nation—George Washington really was a member of the Truro Parish Vestry and so was his father Augustine! We are the ones with the Cathedral on the hill that hosts national events such as Presidential funerals and prayer services after national disasters. We are the ones who helped shape the language of faith for this great nation. All true, but it can quickly become a source of arrogance and pride.

A few years ago a book was published with the title, “*The Power of their Glory: America’s ruling class, the Episcopalians.*” It attempted to show how the Episcopal Church, though

small in numbers, has had a disproportionate share of this nation’s leadership. It wasn’t a very good book, but it did continue this myth that we are the church of prestige and power. Is that really who we are? Is that who we want to be?

A SERVANT CHURCH

One day James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

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Jesus gave his life so that we might find life. He paid the ultimate price so that we could have eternal reward.

Before we all jump on James and John for being power hungry, let's be clear about one thing, they were men of amazing faith. They really believed in Jesus. Contrary to all outward appearances, they believed that this Galilean carpenter was heading for glory when everybody else thought he was headed for destruction. They had faith in Jesus and they were confident that the day would come when Jesus would establish his kingdom. All they wanted was to be given cabinet level positions in his new administration. And based on the evidence before them that took considerable faith! But they did have a fatal flaw—they didn't know how to serve.

"We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." That is not exactly the way to begin!

James and John were demanding that Jesus fit into their plans. They weren't thinking about adjusting to His plans, they wanted their own way.

They were sincere. They were full of faith. But they had got it all wrong!

A true servant says with Jesus, *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,"* and *"Not my will, but yours be done."* It replaces the contemporary idol of "ME, MINE, MYSELF" with a willingness to submit to God's agenda.

I must confess that I have found myself in exactly the same place many times about many different issues. For example, I am very impatient about the state of our church. I know that it has taken at least thirty years of theological slip and slide to get into this mess, but I want it all fixed NOW! I am not sure that I want to take 40 days for discernment—I am more inclined towards 40 minutes! I want to get on with it! God's agenda, however, rarely fits our time schedule.

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

Even though their request was outrageously self-centered Jesus continued the conversation. In so doing he gave them, and us, a wonderful lesson on what it means to be a servant leader in the Kingdom of God. He is willing to listen and engage long past the point when many of us would have walked away. He doesn't give up.

Immediately prior to this incident Jesus had told the disciples that he had to go up to Jerusalem. He warned them that the religious leaders would betray him. The cup of suffering that he would drink and the baptism that he would experience were graphic descriptions of his impending death. So what he was really saying was this,

"Are you really willing to follow me? Are you ready to offer your lives? Are you sure that you can do that?"

Jesus knew that was the cost of their request. Greatness in the kingdom would cost them their lives. *"We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."*

History teaches us that both James and John did die an agonizing death for their faith. But not before they faced the fury of their fellow disciples! When the ten heard about their proposal, they became

indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, *"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."*

This is radical stuff in today's culture where *servanthood* is not exactly highly regarded. But Jesus challenges the prevailing culture and shows us a new way of living. He came to serve and serving always means giving. For Jesus it meant giving his life. The prophet Isaiah declared that *... He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed... He was oppressed and afflicted, ... he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, ... he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. (Isaiah 53:5,8)*

Jesus gave his life so that we might find life. He paid the ultimate price so that we could have eternal reward. He also showed us the essential character of those who would be His followers: *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."*

We are to be a **servant church**.

Servanthood, self-denial and walking the way of the cross are always costly. For some of our sisters and brothers around the Anglican Communion it means risking their lives. Even though that may not be asked of us, I believe that if we are to be faithful to our founder we must always be a church that serves.

- We serve through giving our time... and many at Truro give very generously of their time.

- We serve through giving our money... we are blessed by the number of people who give, and who have continued to give sacrificially through these turbulent times—please don't stop!

- We serve as we give of ourselves... when we see all that we

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have and all that we are as a gift from God given to bless the world. That is what it means to be a servant church!

A SUBMITTED CHURCH

We are also to be a submitted church.

- We are to submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ.
- We are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- We are to submit our lives to the authority of the Scriptures out of love for Christ.

Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”* John 14:15

Two weeks ago Warren and Emily Thrasher, along with June Leeuwrik, were in Rome as part of the Compass Rose Society annual mission trip. They went for an audience with the Pope and to explore the amazing history of that remarkable city. Their time with Pope Benedict wasn’t exactly as advertised. Instead of a private audience they were joined by about 28,000 other eager pilgrims, but afterwards they did have time to talk with Fr Don Bolan, the man charged with overseeing ecumenical conversations for the Vatican. He acknowledged that the actions of the Episcopal Church have completely disrupted his efforts with regard to the Anglican Communion. “The real issue is one of authority: the authority of the Scriptures and the authority of the Church with regard to morality and ethics.” He said. “We thought we were in agreement—because of Lambeth 1.10—but now we are not so sure who believes what!”

As we reflect upon our own future direction, if we are to be true to our own history, we must be a church that is submitted to the authority of Scripture. But it won’t always be easy. Listen again to the writer to the Hebrews: *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12)

The Scriptures challenge every one of us. When we read the Bible, and allow it to read us, we will find it shining a light into the hidden places of our lives, places where we need to change. There will be old habits that must be abandoned and new disciplines that need to be embraced.

One discipline that we all need more of is regular Bible study. Even though we all know that it is good for us, we find it hard to set aside the time. When it comes to Bible teaching Terry Fullam

is one of my great mentors. He admits that he learned a great deal from his mother who was an equally remarkable woman. She used to say “either the Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Bible!” It’s true.

Personal transformation, however, is only one result of submission to the authority of Scripture. The Scriptures will also set the agenda for our life as a church.

In the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12 and 13, we find a remarkable series of verses that outline the mission of the local church. I used them as the basis for the first Shrine Mont teaching that I gave more than 15 years ago. I called them God’s Vision for Truro Church.

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’ 1 Keep on loving each other as brothers. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. 4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ 6 So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’ 7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 12:28, 13:8)

Let me highlight the opening verses because they are as relevant today as they were then.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God

acceptably with reverence and awe . . .

This letter was written to encourage Christians who were going through a time of great upheaval. Many of them had lost their jobs and were suffering great hardship and persecution because of their faith. The future seemed very uncertain and the wonderful promises of the Bible seemed out of reach. Instead of withdrawing into fear and self pity they were challenged to come out *“and [so] worship God acceptably with reverence and awe for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”*

That leads me to my final point . . . we are to be

A SOLD-OUT CHURCH

A servant church, a submitted church, and finally we are to be a

We must be a church that is submitted to the authority of Scripture.

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church that is completely sold-out to the Lord in worship. When we worship we are to “... *approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*”

We worship boldly; we worship confidently because we know that we have no other hope. This is it! This is all that there is! We have nowhere else to turn. But we know that our God will never fail us. We know that He is the answer for our every need. In whatever direction our future lies I pray that we will always be a church that is **sold out** in its worship. Somebody once asked me whether we were high church or low church. My answer was that we were neither—we were deep church! We take worship both very seriously and very joyfully. Worship

is intense at Truro – and that is the way that it must be. We worship what we are passionate about – that is what true worship means.

Boring or bland worship is a ghastly oxymoron. There can be no such thing. Our worship demands all that we are and in return God promises to give us all that we need.

As we pray together about our future, as we seek God’s will for this Church please hold onto these three essential attributes:

1. We are to be A SERVANT CHURCH
2. We are to be A SUBMITTED CHURCH
3. We are to be A SOLD OUT CHURCH



Martyn Minns, Rector

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