

# PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

## GETTING WHAT YOU WANT

Mark 10:35-45 October 18, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

We shy away from the word sacrifice and what it means in our lives. That is a bit curious to me, because looking at our lives we are bound by countless sacrifices. Remember the phrase, “No pain, no gain!” And we know well the phrase, “It is going to cost you.” Sacrifice – giving up something for a greater good. It is a part of our living.

As a child growing up, the concept of Christmas came true in our family in September or October. That is when we would get this huge package from Sears and Roebuck. Sometime in August, we would sit down with Moma and the Sears and Roebuck catalogue and order clothes, shoes – things we would need for school and for fall. Depending on the shape of my jacket, sometimes I could order a new jacket. Sorry to my brothers, but there are advantages to being the oldest boy! We couldn’t order just anything. It was not a wish list like Christmas. We could get two shirts, a couple of pair of pants – the order was bound by what we could afford for the family. So we would look at the catalogue and place the order. I remember even picking the color of the shirt – didn’t mean necessarily that it would be that color when the order arrived, but it would be a new shirt. We ordered late August because that is when we began the cotton picking. Cotton, that cash crop for tenant farmers. By the time our catalogue order arrived, we would have the money to pay for it. I don’t remember much in that big package for my parents. As I got older, I became more and more aware of how often my parents would “make do” with things for themselves so we children could have the things we needed for school. They sacrificed – in many ways for the family. You parents in the congregation today know well that sacrifice of time, energy, family resources for children. As my own children grew, I could understand that sacrifice on the part of my parents. Like them, I never thought of what I did for my children as sacrifice. But it actually is. I believe that is just a part of parenthood. Being a good parent means giving up or putting off things as the children become a priority in our lives. I gave up golf for 10 years. That was really no sacrifice to me – though I liked playing golf.

Jesus is on this journey to Jerusalem. The end of that journey will be the sacrifice of his life for the cause of justice, the cause of inclusion into God’s Kingdom of the “least of these, the unwavering loyalty to his belief in the will of God for his life. Right after Peter correctly identifies Jesus as “messiah” at the Caesarea-Philippi incident, Jesus begins to teach the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem and that he will die. Jesus also says that if anyone wants to follow him, that they will take up the cross. The disciples never really get this idea of sacrifice. They have this grand vision that this Messiah, Jesus, is going to chase out the Romans and set up the Kingdom of Israel like it was

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under King David. This Kingdom of God that is “Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself” is not their highest priority.

In today’s text James and John, the sons of Zebedee, among the very first disciples chosen by Jesus, come forward to ask Jesus a question. “Teacher, we want you do for us whatever we ask of you?” Now, Jesus doesn’t have children of his own, but he has apparently learned something every parent knows. When your children ask you to approve something before they tell you what is it, you had better be getting some information before granting a blanket approval. So Jesus asks, “What is it you want me to do for you?” James and John want Jesus to grant them the right to sit, one on his right and one on his left, when he comes into his glory. Jesus explains to them. “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I will drink? Are you able to be baptized with my baptism?” Their reply is, “We are able.” Jesus talks of his limitations. “You will drink the cup and be baptized, but it is not for me to grant you places to sit in the Kingdom of God.” We don’t like the light that this cast of these disciples we love. Maybe that is why in Matthew’s account of this incident that he takes a totally different direction. Maybe Matthew is uncomfortable with the arrogance of James and John? Maybe he wants the disciples to be above this kind of behavior. So Matthew, decides to put the blame on a “pushy” mother. It is the mother of James and John in his account that asks Jesus if her sons can sit on his right and left when he comes into his glory. The other disciples hear this and they are angry with James and John. Jesus tries to push the discussion past seats of honor in the Kingdom. He reminds them that he ways of the Kingdom does not follow the ways of the world. The Kingdom does not make distinctions in the same way the world does. Love, forgiveness, reconciliation, welcoming all – they are all important. Jesus tries to focus the attention of these twelve who have been with him all along on discipleship. How do we look at this today? We may be embarrassed for James and John, they are among the original twelve. Their names we learn in confirmation class. We know them from Sunday School and from the reading of the scripture in worship and at home. But, honestly, we are all sons of Zebedee. We know better than to make outlandish request of the best seats in the Kingdom, but we do spend time in our lives searching for privileged positions. We are kin to James and John, these sons of Zebedee. We would like the best office space in our company. A minister would like that large church in a growing area with a nice comfortable salary. We all want our children to be at the top of the class. We want lots of things that we would not admit out loud. My friend, Sally Harris tells of her work with the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Part of her work was to sell tickets to people over the phone or walk-ins. The people in the office would laugh because everyone who called or walked in to buy tickets wanted front row, center section seats. No exceptions. When she left that job they gave her a tee shirt with the words “Front Row, Center Section” printed on it!! In worship we will often use a “Prayer for the Church.” One line in it is the hope that “the church, may give up it’s life, that like her crucified Lord she may mount by the path of the cross to a higher glory.” Let us hear that call which calls us beyond ourselves that will lead to a higher glory for all of God’s children.