PROPER 24 – B

The Call to Discipleship

SCRIPTURES

Job 38:1-7 (34-41) (Track 1) Isaiah 53:4-12 (Track 2) Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c (Track 1) Psalm 91:9-16 (Track 2) Hebrews 5:1-10 Mark 10:35-45



Today's Readings

Today's readings remind us that the call to discipleship is a call to service and sacrifice. Yahweh finally appears to Job (Track 1) and challenges his understanding of God's mysterious rule over all creation. In Isaiah (Track 2), the "suffering servant" of Israel, though innocent, takes on the sin, sorrow, pain and oppression of God's people. In Hebrews, Jesus, the full embodiment of the "suffering servant," identifies with humanity, offering himself as final high priest and ultimate sacrifice. In today's gospel, Jesus reverses our understanding of greatness: those who would lead must serve all others.

Job 38:1-7, (34-41) (Track 1)

Speaking out of profound faith, Job has asserted his innocence and challenged God to answer him (31:35-40) and account for his suffering. In today's reading, the Lord speaks from the whirlwind in fulfillment of Job's longing (13:22, 23:5, 30:20).

The dramatic climax of the book comes with the appearance of Yahweh, creator of heaven and earth, in response to Job's challenge. The divine voice from the whirlwind responds with language filled with images of word and combat. God has come to engage in combat with the human revolutionary Job and with the forces of chaos. Thus God will destabilize Job's proposal that humans should rule over creation by pointing out their impotence and reaffirm the constant divine struggle against chaotic forces that seek to upset the ordered creation that God has established. • What does God's answer to Job reveal about God's interests?

• How might we best help God with the care of creation today?

Isaiah 53:4-12 (Track 2)

Today's passage comes from the second part of the fourth "servant song" in Isaiah. Throughout the passage, the servant remains one with all people in suffering yet distinct from them in innocence and service to God. His role as representative is made clear. What was "ours" (infirmities, diseases, transgressions, iniquities) was made his, though he was always in right relationship with God.

Disaster and affliction were thought to be evidence of God's judgment on an individual's wickedness. Yet the life and death of the servant were in God's hands, and his experiences were a part of God's plan. Ultimately the righteousness of the servant will be made clear.

• How can one's suffering serve others?

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• How might the suffering servant be an example for us?

• How does the image of the suffering servant apply to Jesus' life and ministry?

Hebrews 5:1-10

The author of Hebrews began by demonstrating Jesus' superiority to angels, the messengers of the law. Then he discussed Jesus' superiority to Moses, the greatest Jewish leader and prophet. In chapter 4, the author begins his discussion of Jesus' superiority to the Jewish high priest.

Priests came from the tribe of Levi. The high priests were descendants of Aaron, who was appointed by God. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, but as the quotation from Psalm 2:7 demonstrates (5:5), he was also chosen by God, not self-appointed. His priesthood transcends the Levitical priesthood because it is modeled on that of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4), whom the author later demonstrates as being superior to Abraham (7:1-10) and thus to Abraham's descendant Levi and the Levitical priests.

Jesus' sacrifice is superior because he did not have to offer sacrifice for himself as well as for the people. His unique role as the final high priest was made clear through his suffering and his choice of obedience to God's will. Thus entering completely into the human condition, Jesus fully represents human need with perfect sympathy. • How is Jesus' priesthood similar to the Jewish priests? different?

• What is "reverent submission" (v. 7)? What does society think of this attitude today?

How would you approach God with reverent submission?

Mark 10:35-45

Today's gospel reading consists of two parts: the story about who would be greatest in the kingdom and Jesus' teaching about greatness and power. Jesus' answer to James and John draws upon the Old Testament image—"drinking

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© 2015 Published by Morehouse Education Resources, www.MorehouseEducation.org. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted to reproduce this page for use in the purchasing congregation only. © 2015 Published by Morehouse Education Resources, www.MorehouseEducation.org. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted to reproduce this page for use in the purchasing congregation only. the cup"—for participating in joy or woe, including the cup of the Lord's wrath (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17) and the baptism (washing, flood) of calamity (Psalm 42:7; 69:1).

Jesus uses the occasion to expand on his earlier teaching (9:35), in which he reverses the natural order of hierarchy and power. The Gentiles honored the rulers and "great ones." Within Jesus' kingdom community, however, the most humble slave was to be most highly regarded. Jesus' own example sanctified the lowly and humble role of discipleship. Like him, the truly great person in the kingdom is the one who pours out his or her life in the service of others.

Verse 45 refers explicitly to Isaiah 53:10-12. The "ransom" refers to a payment for the liberation of a slave or hostage. Jesus fulfills all of the implications of the suffering servant figure in the Old Testament.

• In what ways were James and John confused about the meaning of their request?

• If greatness is defined in terms of service and sacrifice, who are some of the great people in your life? How do you show your appreciation of them?

Reflection

Anyone beginning a career in management or seeking authority should find in today's readings nuggets for understanding a leadership role. First, forget the perks. Those with sights set on the luxury condo, the flashy car or the followers' adulation might as well quit right now.

Scripture sets forth entirely different grounds than society's for those who would lead. Jesus is the Master because he shares in human weakness and temptation. What we might find our least praiseworthy qualities, he embraces. Furthermore, his followers are distinguished not by anything they have achieved, but by their fidelity to sharing human suffering. If they come into any reward, it is God's gift, nothing they have earned.

For example, imagine an awards banquet. Where might we find Christ: with the honoree at the head table, basking in glory and applause, or the server clearing plates and pouring coffee quietly, trying not to interrupt the speeches?

We can only imagine the sorrow in Christ's heart as he sees some religious leaders today making a mockery of his vision. When they follow the dictates of the culture rather than the demands of the gospel, they must sorely disappoint him. Sadly he repeats, "It cannot be like that with you."

Quietly consider:

• What sacrifice might I need to make to serve others today?

Prayer Starter

In the Lord's Prayer we ask to be delivered from evil. Deliver me today, O God, from...

Food for Thought

Jesus was a person "whose rage of compassion was founded on a very accurate social analysis, and issued not only in an outpouring of immediate healing and personal liberation, but in the creation of an alternative model of relationship between believers and between God and humankind."

-Rosemary Houghton

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