

“Trading Treasure for Trinkets” 2015  
Psalm 33:13-22      Mark 10:32-44

Kathy and I have a couple of small dogs, Jojo and Cloe,  
and each one probably weights no more than a dozen pounds or so.

It's amusing to watch them trying so hard to impose their will,  
their need to be first in the door or win silly victories,  
and their life-quest  
for attention, recognition and more doggy-treats.

**\* It's all very silly and also pretty close to human behavior.**

Sometimes

we too get caught up in similar struggles for first place,  
or to win meaningless, egocentric and selfish victories,  
as Martin Luther King described it in one of his sermons,  
"... there is deep down within all of us an instinct. It's a kind of drum major instinct – a  
desire to be out front, a desire to lead a parade, a desire to be first ... We all have the drum  
major instinct. We all want to be important, to surpass others, to achieve distinction, to lead  
the parade... this quest for recognition, this desire for attention, this desire for distinction is  
the basic impulse, the basic drive of human life, this drum major instinct."

**We are all driven by this drum major instinct, whether it's  
for prominence, attention, recognition or more doggy-treats.**

Earlier this week, I participated in the career day program at  
Las Cruces High School where people from various professions  
are invited to speak with freshmen about their job & training,  
hopefully to help those students see the connection  
between what they are being taught in the classroom  
and eventually getting a job to make a living.

In contrast to some speakers, my conversation with the students  
didn't focus so much on the financial aspects of being a pastor.  
But instead, the students resonated with the idea  
that we want our lives to matter, to have meaning,  
and know that we make a difference in this world.

**\* Ultimately, we want our lives to be about more than just  
accumulating doggy-treats and getting through the door first.**

I went on to explain to the students in the groups I met with,  
that when I help plan a funeral with a grieving family,

no one has ever wanted to make sure I mentioned  
how much money their loved one had made  
or how many possessions they had acquired...

... but rather they want me to emphasize  
their positive influence, the difference their life has made,  
\* **which is the true and precious treasure that lives on.**

That is the true blessing, the fruit of being  
the loved and precious children of God that we are,  
**and that is the message that Jesus is teaching in Mark.**

The Mark passage we read today begins  
with a powerful and important image of Christ, vs. 32  
They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of  
them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.

Let's think about that scene, for Mark is telling this story  
about an event that really did happen back then,  
but he is also making a connection between the story  
and the circumstances of Mark's faith-community...  
**... as a teaching relevant to what they were going through.**

It was intended as a hopeful and reassuring message  
to those early Christians struggling under persecution  
and trying to make sense of what they were enduring.

The critical truth and image for them to remember, was to see  
Jesus in front of them, walking ahead and leading them.  
And for Mark's audience, the disciples represent that church,  
amazed by the wonder of God's mercy, grace and truth ...  
... but also a bit befuddled, confused and afraid,  
not sure of what lies ahead or where they were going.

It strikes me that in this story, that Jesus  
doesn't begin by offering comfort or ease to the disciples,  
but instead, he describes in even more vivid detail  
what will happen in Jerusalem, his suffering & death ...  
... and only after all that, he promises them, vs. 34  
"... and after three days he will rise again."

That is also the promise and message for Mark's community,

“Yes, you will struggle and suffer, and you will be persecuted,  
but God is in charge, at work leading and sustaining you.

**The Church of Jesus Christ will prevail.**

**Not just survive, but be raised again just as the Lord promised.**

This is also our hope, not that we avoid life’s trials and troubles,  
but that with God is at work in us, leading and sustaining us,  
and we will be raised to glory in the end, as promised.

Meanwhile, we are called to live and be a faithful community,  
that helps each grow toward the best as God intends ...  
... in authentic relationships with God and neighbors.

The challenge is that sometimes, distracted by world and culture,  
we diminish the image and glory of the Holy Spirit in us  
by selling out

for short term gains like doggy-treats or being first  
by trading what is truly precious for mere trinkets.

That presents a challenge that is easier said than done,  
for the text is clear that the disciples really didn’t get it,  
but were still mired in this world’s values and perspective.

James and John pull Jesus aside and try to call “shotgun”,  
they want to sit up in the front seat with the driver.

They envision positions of honor and pre-eminence in glory, vs. 37

And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in  
your glory.”

Ironically what they did not envision

was that the ones who would end up on Jesus’ right and left hand

**would be hanging on crosses with him...**

**as Jesus was raised up on the cross into glory.**

And to me, the great surprise of this scene is that rather than  
responding with frustration or anger toward John and James  
for their foolish, impertinent and presumptive request,

**Jesus answers with graceful gentleness and patience.**

He turns the situation around into an opportunity to teach  
by calling them to a deeper and more authentic faith.

Jesus begins the lesson by pointing out  
that they know what it is to be ground down by ruling gentiles,  
by Rome's crushing quest for wealth, power and authority.  
They have felt what it was like under the heel of Roman occupation.

And the message of grace that Jesus brought was,  
it's not going to be like that, it's not to be that way among us.

\* **You are far more loved and precious to God than that,  
for we have been blessed and redefined by the Lord's grace.**

It is fine and appropriate to strive worthily for excellence.  
And Jesus is not against high ambition, goals and aspirations,  
**for indeed mediocrity and lazy complacency  
are not a part the faithful discipleship Jesus desires.**

But Jesus wants us to shift toward a more appropriate target,  
God's will and glory rather than human ego and selfish pride.

Now this is not something we can accomplish by our will and effort,  
and will be no final victory in this during our mortal lives.  
But because of the power of the gift of God's gracious love,  
we can be inspired, empowered and gradually transformed.  
**And as we draw nearer to the Lord, we become more able  
to live generous and compassionate lives, as God intends.**

So, those who follow Jesus Christ, will serve themselves last,  
and the needs of others will take precedent over their own...  
**... and so we won't so willing to trade  
that which is treasure for silly trinkets of this world.**

Last weekend while I was blessed  
to be with our youth group on their retreat at Capitan,  
I was privileged to see  
the lesson of this Mark 10 passage put into action.

The first night, we all went up to the gym and played dodgeball.  
It was a lot of fun and laughter.  
We all enjoyed it and wanted to do it again.

On the last night we shifted the schedule so we could play again,  
but this time it got to be a lot more competitive,

especially among some of the more athletic  
who couldn't stand getting out or losing a game.

So feeling an urgency to win, to be victorious and first,  
or as Martin Luther King described it, “the drum major instinct”,  
some of the rules and principles  
of fair play and good sportsmanship slipped a bit ...  
... and it got to be more and more competitive and combative.  
**It felt increasingly tense and not nearly as much fun.**

Later that night the youth group talked about what had happened,  
and I so love and admire the way our youth responded.

Together,  
they talked about what sort of youth group they wanted to be.  
And in their own words they explained  
that they wanted to care more about each other  
than they worried about who was winning a game...  
...or anything else  
that distorts or diminishes the relationships they share.

I am so proud, pleased and delighted  
with the youth group of this church  
with the character they exhibited,  
and desire to follow and walk with our Lord.

I'm pretty sure they get what Jesus was saying in vs. 43-44  
“... whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever  
wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”

Today, here is the hope and grace, as we read earlier from Psalm 33,  
The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind. From where he sits  
enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth— he who fashions the hearts of them all,  
and observes all their deeds.

Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O  
Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.