

Sermon Mark 10:35-45

Good morning, everyone. As we are all over 50, Hamish isn't here! Have you ever thought about what your wrinkles and grey hair represents? Could they be the markers of a life well lived, to be proud of rather than something to hide. One thing we need to be aware of as we age is that we can embrace just being instead of doing so much. But ageing doesn't diminish our value. It brings us closer to what truly matters, love, connection and inner peace.

So we read the gospel remembering context and also being realistic about what we can apply to our lives. Although I have to say I am pretty impressed by how active most of you are in your Christian walk.

Here are a few old sayings you might recall: no pain no gain; This phrase is found in Romans 5:3-5 suggesting that enduring suffering can lead to character development. But the ultimate saying is in today's gospel by Mark "you need to drink the cup of suffering" Jesus said. Today we often have to take medication that is a bitter pill. Both expressions suggest that enduring hardship or facing difficult circumstances is not a pleasant experience, but may be necessary for growth, healing or following Jesus. This gospel shows what we need to do to follow Jesus.

The disciples James and John were seeking a special place in the kingdom of God. Their request reveals a very human desire: the longing for recognition and greatness. They want top place, to sit at Jesus' right and left, the places of honour, in His glory. But Jesus' response teaches them—and us—what true greatness in His kingdom looks like. It is not about being elevated above others or receiving special privileges; it is about following the path of humility, service, and sacrifice.

James and John's request for seats of Honour makes the other disciples indignant. Their frustration wasn't because they understood the path of servanthood better than James and John; it was because they too wanted those positions of honour. This reveals how deeply rooted the desire for power and recognition is, even among those closest to Jesus. We all desire to be significant and to be recognised. There is nothing wrong with wanting to do something meaningful. However, in their request, we see a

misunderstanding of what it means to follow Jesus. They thought that following Jesus would lead to glory in the form of power and status. Some context..... this was a strong desire in them because at that time the Markan community were being persecuted by the ruling Romans. They hoped Jesus would be the great leader and they would be his closest followers. Ruling with power and might in his Kingdom. But they were thinking that the kingdom of Jesus would be modelled on worldly kingdoms. Those in high places would enjoy honour, glory and be powerful.

But Jesus redirects their thinking. He doesn't rebuke them for their desire to be great; instead, He challenges their understanding of greatness. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?" he asks. The "cup" and the "baptism" refer to His coming suffering and death. Jesus is saying that God's kingdom is marked by suffering for others, not by being exalted over others.

One of the images the Bible uses for life is that of a cup. Just as a cup may be filled with a bittersweet drink so the life of each of us could be said to be a mixture of the sweet and the bitter. As well as standing for life as a whole, the cup can stand for a particular segment of life. There may be times when the cup of life is full of bitterness. It may be that we don't want to drink it or feel we're not able to drink it. But at other times the cup may be overflowing with sweetness. Then we can't get enough of it. And at still other times the cup may be flat and tasteless, finally there may be times when the cup of life is empty.

When Jesus asked them "can you drink the cup that I am to drink?" they immediately said they could, because they thought it would be a very sweet cup. But what Jesus was really asking them was "are you willing to go through the suffering that I am going to go through"? Jesus points to His own life as the ultimate example: "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." Here is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the One through whom all things were created. Yet, He did not come demanding to be served. He came to serve and give His life as a ransom.

This is the essence of Christian discipleship. Jesus' entire life and ministry were characterised by self-giving love. The drinking of the bitter cup was no easy thing - the cup of sacrifice and suffering. Indeed, when the time came for Jesus to drink

it, he shrinks from it. Three times he asked the Father to remove it from him “Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from me” (Mt 26;39). But then he added, let not my will but thine be done. And he did drink it. The most bitter cup imaginable, death on a cross. During his ministry he served the sick, the poor, and the marginalised. He washed His disciples’ feet. A servant to all.

And ultimately, He gave His life on the cross. His sacrificial death was the greatest act of service, freeing humanity from the bondage of sin. The apostles did not know at this time that the Lord's cup would be a very bitter one. Nor did they know their own weakness. So, when the time came, far from drinking the cup with him, they left him to drink the bitter cup alone.

We do not know in advance what the cup of life holds for us, we find out as we go along. By our senior years we have found out quite a bit about what the cap holds for us. Personally I'm glad I didn't know before hand some of the bitter cups I would drink from. Jesus the innocent one, chose to drink a very bitter cup but as we have seen he did not find it easy. Yet he drank it, out of love for us. Love can make a bitter cup drinkable. (think of the necessity of a medicine that must be drunk). Even though Jesus was without sin, he did experience weakness and temptation as we do. He understands our weakness. So, we should approach him with confidence, knowing that he can and will help us. If we find the cup of life particularly bitter, there is no need for us to pretend that it is sweet, or to think that we can drink it by our own strength. Unlike the two apostles, let us not be afraid or ashamed to say, no Lord, I cannot drink it. I do not want to drink it. But if I have to, then with your help I will.

To drink the cup of life, especially a cup made difficult by a life of sacrifice and service of others, is to follow Christ. Embracing Sacrifice is the cost of discipleship. It may mean sacrificing our time, resources, or comfort for the sake of others. As Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” We are called to put others before ourselves, even when it is difficult or inconvenient. We are also called to reject the world’s standards of greatness and adopt the way of Jesus—the way of the servant. Mark’s gospel today presents a challenging yet beautiful picture of what it means to be great in God’s eyes. It isn’t about positions of Honour, recognition, or power. It’s about following Jesus on the path of humility and service, and loving others. Those who share the bitterness of his cross will also share the sweetness of his Easter victory. May we heed Jesus’ words and follow His example. Let us not seek to be served, but to serve and in doing so, find

the true greatness that comes from living for others as Christ lived—and died—
for us. Amen. Let us pray. God's power and love, cleanse us of greed and envy,
and close at in gentleness and humility, so that we may become more like your
son and so come to share his glory in heaven. He asked his through the same
Christ our Lord. Amen.