

April 6, 2019 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
 Mark 10:35-45 The Bold Ask of the Brothers, by Andy McDonald

There is deep within each of our hearts a yearning, a longing, a hunger. Sometimes it tries to link up with really noble and worthy causes, even pure and holy ones. We can rationalize it. It seems so much a part of who we are that it is almost impossible to see its folly, but it as real as the sunrise. We want what we want when we want it.

It's what makes dieting so not fun. Because when we are dieting what we want doesn't go away...we still pass the fudge shop over in Winter Parke and hear it call our name—and want what we want when we want it.

Or maybe we are just chilling at home on the couch watching our favorite show and the refrigerator has plenty of carrots and celery and apples but the cupboard has chips and we could make some dip!

Wanting what we want when we want it is why it's so hard to save for the future. Theoretically we know we need to plan for rainy days and years of retirement. But then there's that new _____ we just have to get. Or the ticket we must purchase, or that trip we have to take, or all our friends are going to that expensive restaurant and we don't want to be left out.

In the story of the origins of humanity, as the story has just begun in a perfect environment, with perfect people, with everything provided for them, and all is just right, the initial temptation is to get our primal parents to want something. To want what they want when they want it.

This default in us is why we love the idea I mentioned as we began this series. We love the idea of that genie in a bottle coming to grant our three wishes.

This idea of wanting what we want when we want it is why some people warp their thinking to turn God into Santa and prayer into our wish list.

We've looked at the bold ask of the Demons, of a Dad for his Boy, of the Thief on the Cross, the Leper, and we conclude today with the Bold Ask of the Brothers. This may be the most audacious ask—maybe bold on steroids. James and John make a bold ask, we will deal with that in a moment, but the audacious ask is really the pre-ask.

I've learned from people who work in fund raising and philanthropy that one of the strategies they use is the qualifying ask, sort of the ask before the ask. One of the difficulties they write about is that you don't want to insult a potentially large donor by asking too little, nor do you want to over assume and ask for too much. So you work to qualify your ask and set it up with other asks.

James and John have no savvy but they do propose a qualifying ask. It is a little amazing they would be so bold. This is recorded in Mark 10 and just a few verses earlier in Mark 9 Jesus has taught on something very similar that should have influenced their thinking.

Also just prior to James and John coming over and speaking to Jesus in Mark 10:35 Jesus has just shared some disturbing teaching that, with any understanding, should have dampened their hutzpah.

Mark 10:32 tells us they were now on the way to Jerusalem. This is the last trip to Jerusalem. In the next chapter Jesus will ride into Jerusalem in the triumphal entry and a week later experience the crucifixion. So as they are walking toward this crescendo Jesus, takes the disciples aside, and one more time tries to describe everything that's about to happen to him and to them in Jerusalem.

Listen to what he tells them: "When we get to Jerusalem, the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. They will mock him, spit on him, beat him with their whips, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again." Mark 10:33&34

I have to ask you, What is fuzzy here? Where's the riddle? How much clearer could Jesus have said it? What is cryptic? How do you miss the message?

Here's how. Something about what sin has done in our species is to seemingly pass down some brain malware. There's this strange default in our thinking that locks us into what we have already seen or experienced or believed. There's nothing wrong with having traditions but we have to be careful of traditional thinking. Something about the way we are wired, when we get a picture of how things are it is almost impossible for us to see it differently, even when we hear authoritative voices speaking into it, attempting to enlarge our understanding, our seemingly natural bent from some aspect of the malware of sin, has us holding on to our previous understanding, the way we initially saw it. We actually will twist new contrary information to try and support our wrong understanding. Self-created blind spots!

For several years James and John and the other disciples have been proclaiming everywhere, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

They had heard Jesus promise that many would sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God!

Jesus had promised to all who had left everything for his sake a hundred fold in this life, and a part in his kingdom.

Jesus had promised positions of high honor in his kingdom to sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

Jesus had taught them that all the things written in the prophets concerning him should be fulfilled. And had not the prophets foretold the glory of the Messiah's reign!

In the light of all of this understanding they thought they had so right, Jesus' words about betrayal, and persecution and death seem out of context and vague. They knew what they knew. They had to take these things they could hardly hear Jesus saying and somehow smash them into the story in their heads. They had to discount Jesus' words by thinking that whatever difficulties might be around the corner, the kingdom was soon to be established.

Jesus words about what is about to happen are immediately followed by this amazing qualifying ask of Jesus by James and John. Maybe Jesus and the disciples have started walking again toward Jerusalem after Jesus stopped and gathered them for his words about what was soon to happen to him.

Jesus strides ahead and maybe the disciples are moving a little slower as they discuss what in the world he must have meant by what he just said.

Now James and John pick up their pace to catch up to Jesus and they spoke to him. What they are about to say, you wonder how they thought it was okay after these years with Jesus. As I've considered the story it seems to me to be a bold ask of someone from whom you thought "owed" you a yes.

Maybe because of a family connection. If we look at the women at the cross in the gospels and do some deductive reasoning it just may be that James and John were Jesus' first cousins, and maybe it is this family connection the emboldens their ask, sort of like Jesus let's keep this in the family. Or maybe they just think they deserve something for their time working together with Jesus. Maybe because Jesus has sort of had a special connection with them and Peter. What is obvious is that they have some attitude of entitlement.

For those of you familiar with the story you may already be anticipating their request for the two seats of honor on Jesus right and left in his glorious kingdom. And that is the specific ask. But I'm most amazed at their qualifying ask. One of the most accurate versions is the New American Study Bible and here's that translation: "And James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to him, saying to him, 'Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.'"

Don't be too hard on James and John. Isn't that how we often think of prayer?

Whether we have the nerve for bold asks or just minor ones;

Whether we are asking to see world hunger resolved or for it to not rain our picnic;

Whether we are boldly asking for cancer to be cured or just to get cured of our common cold.

In essence aren't we plagued by our own selfishness to want what we want when we want it, so too often locked behind our prayers, our bold ask is the thinking, "God we want you to step up to the plate and come through for us and do for us whatever we ask of you!"

Jesus is so gracious. He asks them, "What is it that you would like for me to do for you?"

And they make their request: "In your glorious kingdom, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one at your right and the other at your left."

I love Jesus answer. There's always an answer whether we get to understand it right now or in the future. This time Jesus speaks in the now to them.

Before we hear the words of his response I want us to all think about some our bold asks to which we feel there's been no answer. There maybe children we've prayed about and made bold asks. Or a spouse. Health issues. Hurt relationships that need healing. Economics. Victory over some weakness. A door to be opened for us. The list may be a mile long. And we can all get frustrated, hurt, mad, even angry in the absence of answers. That's reality. But listen to what Jesus says to these two brothers, possibly his cousins, these two who have been living and working and spending time with Jesus. Listen to what he says to their audacious ask.

Mark 10:38 “You don’t know what you are asking!” We think we understand. After all it is our life, we are living it. We know our history. We know what we know and truth is we want what we want when we want it! How dare God whisper in our ear, “You don’t know what you are asking!” But it is the truth.

Paul writes it to the Romans. “For we don’t even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groaning’s that cannot be expressed in words.” Romans 8:26

James and John wanted prestige and power and didn’t grasp that to be next to Jesus in his kingdom was place of sacrifice, a bitter cup of sorrow on the way and a baptism of suffering. When Jesus challenges them with this reality their egos imagine themselves able.

When the other disciples realize what James and John have asked they are indignant. They were angry, filled with resentment, outraged, annoyed, the King James translates it “much displeased”.

They were mainly frustrated that somehow James and John had gotten in line ahead of them. So Jesus calls them together and gave them the constitution, the law, the rule for his kingdom.

It was shocking and counter cultural then and it is shocking and counter cultural today in 2019. It isn’t what we might pick but it is the very foundation of Christ’s kingdom.

Jesus said, “You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others and to give my life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45

Our, my natural bent, part of the malware of sin in my heart, wants what it wants when it wants it. Somehow we imagine the pinnacle of existence to be having others serve us. And so, like James and John, we may ask power, and control, and positions of authority.

And Jesus says my kingdom is upside down. You don’t know what you are asking. The best place is serving. The best activity is giving up our lives as a ransom for others.

John as an old man writing to his friends in what we call the book of 1 John may have been recalling this day as he wrote, “This is the message we have heard from the beginning: we should love one another... We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters. But if anyone has enough money to live well, and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help—how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.”

This is the kingdom of God, and the call of that kingdom is a call, not to find some place or position where we will be served, but to be servants. Not to try and hold on to our precious little mortal lives but to pour them out, to use them up ransoming many.

So, we come to the end of this series on the Bold Ask, in the end it seems there is one safe bold ask. Father, please I boldly ask for your will to be done. Amen.



How has wanting what you want when you want it worked out?

What are some areas where you struggle some with delayed gratification? (Think immediate benefit vs future benefit)

What do you think would be best about having a genie in a bottle ready to grant you three wishes?

How are you tempted to think of God as a celestial Santa Claus?

Jesus tells disciples what's ahead in Jerusalem. What do you think about our attachment to what we already understand that may block additional understandings, even if told to us?

Have you ever tried to "bargain" with God in prayer? If so what kinds of things have you offered from your side ?

What might be wrong or right about expecting God to do whatever we ask or demand?

How do you handle God saying, "you don't know what you're asking"?

What do you think about God's kingdom being about serving and giving our lives for others? How will you practice kingdom living?



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