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Mark 10:32-45  
What Are We Made Of?  
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Strike three! Three times Jesus predicted his passion; three times the disciples fail to understand him. Mark portrays the disciples as a bunch of fumbling, bumbling Keystone Kops. I think today's reaction takes the cake. On this, the third prediction, Jesus gives up on subtle imagery and states as plainly as possible the events that face him at the end of this journey: Jerusalem, betrayed, condemned, mocked, killed. I don't know how much more graphic Jesus could have been without painting them a literal picture, saturated with red paint. And then, as if they don't even hear him, James and John request the places of honor, to the right and to the left of him. Of course, they have no way of knowing that Jesus' place of glory was to be a cross, and that criminals will sit on his right and on his left there.

I'm not sure how the Zebedee brothers made the leap from passion to honor; I'm not sure what they thought Jesus meant by inviting them to share in his cup and his baptism. I have no idea why these two believed they were more worthy than the other 10 disciples, to have the highest place of honor. Honestly, I doubt that the two really thought too much about these things at the time. In fact, I suspect they weren't thinking much at all. It seems to me that fear had pretty much seized them and that in that place of panic, their only focus was survival, and to give them a little credit, they saw Jesus as the key to their security.

Fear has a way of narrowing our focus. We have incredible survival instincts. When faced with danger, the human body shuts down all functioning that isn't necessary to immediate demands in order to focus all its energy on survival. When faced with imminent danger, we move from our thinking brain which might paralyze us with too many options to the lowest part of our brain, the part that covers our instinctive responses and gives us only two options, fight or flight. Journalist and church analyst, Bill Moyers refers to this as our "reptilian brain."

The way our body reacts to fear is an incredibly good thing when faced with imminent danger, say when a speeding car is coming at you head on, or when you are trapped in a burning building, but in other less pressing, albeit equally frightening situations, allowing ourselves to sink into our reptilian brain seriously limits our options.

For my entire ministry career, the church has faced the danger of survival. For my entire career I have heard gloom and doom about our shrinking numbers, about the church splitting in two, about the limited number of qualified applicants entering into seminary, about our diminishing

resources. I don't know if any of you remember this or not, but I distinctly remember sitting at a Woodhaven session meeting about eight years ago and hearing that the church would close its doors within two years because of our declining funds.

Sometimes, we have allowed fear to seize us. We have dropped into our reptilian brains and allowed fear to shape us. We have forgotten everything we have learned about who God is and who we are in God's eyes and we have allowed fear to be the driving force. We've made some pretty interesting choices during these times. At times the church has come to resemble the midway at the state fair, with a cacophony of sight and sounds bidding for our attention and barkers calling at us from every direction. At times we have resembled a battlefield, hidden deeply in our trenches and our artillery all lined up, seeing only enemies in every direction. During these times we are reminded of just how much we share in the Zebedee DNA.

Fear is a healthy response to danger; fear is a part of God's design to protect us. But fear is not how God defines us. God defines us at the font and at the table. Jesus tells the Zebedee brothers that they will share in his baptism and in his cup. This statement is as much about their past as it is about their future. Yes, James and John would face persecution, and James would be the first disciple martyred for his faith. This is part of sharing in Christ baptism and Christ's cups, but the other, more important part, is that before all of that, James and John were defined by their baptism and by their place at the table. At the font, James and John were called children of God, beloved, with whom God is well pleased. Before anything else, before they made their first fumbling, stumbling step towards following Jesus, they were claimed by God. At the table, Jesus gave the bread and the cup to James and to John and said, "Take, eat, drink, this is my body, given for you." At the table James and John became one with Christ, they in him and him in them. More than that, at the table, James and John became the body of Christ and as such, they became nourishment for others. At the table and at the font, we see ourselves as members of the family of God, sharing not only in Zebedee DNA, but also in Christ's DNA.

As people who have our identity in Christ, fear cannot define us. As people who have our identity in Christ, we are shaped by faith. While fear turns our focus inward; faith turns our focus outward. Faith allows us to see the people in front of us not as enemies to be feared and conquered, but as brothers and sisters to be loved and cherished, to be listened to and valued. Faith allows us to see challenges as opportunities for growth. Faith allows us not only to recognize our fears, but also to recognize that our security is not in ourselves, but in God, and this frees us to reach out to others rather than to reach for cover, this frees us to set aside our need for security in order to provide security for someone else.

At the table, Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” At the font we say, “Remember your baptism and be thankful.” Remember. At the table and at the font we remember who and whose we are, and in doing so we are strengthened for the journey ahead.

It’s is no secret that we are living in frightening times. We live in a world of terrorists, and recessions, and joblessness. We live in a world where a single weapon can take out a whole city and were children take guns to school. It is a scary world out there, but here in this place, in the presence of the table and the font, we remember, we are the people of God. We have Christ’s DNA in us. We are a people who are able, in the face of fear, to be Christ presence in the world reaching out with love, giving hope to all. Thanks be to God!