

Matthew 20:17-28
Lent 4; March 26 & 27, 2017

Several weeks ago, I went out to the mailbox after lunch. As I was walking back to the house, I was thumbing through the mail. I had received an envelope that said on it: *Official Jury Summons*. I have to be honest, my first reaction was *ugh*. Well, I thought, I'd better open it to see when it might be. March 20 & 21. After I saw the dates, I also noticed that I was a *Reserve Juror*. Even though those dates were going to be in the middle of Lent, I thought that I might not have to go. After all, I was a *RESERVE* Juror. When I called the number on the notice last Sunday evening to see if I was going to be needed last week, the recording said that all reserve Jurors, beginning with *A, like Adams, through D would need to report* last Monday. (Only 4 letters of the entire alphabet.) But this time, it wasn't downtown. I had to report to the Juvenile Detention Center on Watertown Plank Road. Even though part of me didn't want to take the time to serve Jury Duty, there was a bigger part of me that has respect for the Jury system in our country that I needed to go. So, I went.

Later in the morning, we were called into court to hear a case. The Judge had a list of questions that she asked the panel of potential Jurors. One of the questions that was asked went something like this: *Do you think that you could judge a case on its merits; not on your emotions or feelings?* In other words, do you think you could be fair? It was fascinating to see the response of the people in the courtroom. I was kind of surprised by the number of people who said that they were not comfortable judging someone else. Perhaps, it was because I can't imagine not being able to do that. Here the facts (whatever they may be) and draw a conclusion from them. Easy. Right? How could you not be fair?

The more I thought about that question all week, the more I realized that I judge people all the time. It probably isn't always fair. I'll give you an example. I recently had gone to Menards to pick up two items. Since I only had 2 things, I went through the checkout line that was for people who had 6 items or less. There in front of me there was someone who clearly could not read the sign above the register because they had a couple more items than 6. I began to think: *who are you that you think the rules shouldn't apply to you*. It really didn't take any more time. But how quick I was to judge when I didn't even know that the clerk probably had said that they could come, even if they had more than 6 items.

We like to be judgmental of others and not ourselves. There is that tiny part that is deep down in our hearts that sometimes like to hear bad news about certain people. We use the wrong standard. We compare ourselves to others. We need to stop comparing ourselves to others, but to the standard that God wants us to be. Perfect.

We sometimes overestimate ourselves and underestimate our God. To illustrate that I want to ask the people who are here today a question if you are a parent. *How good of a parent are you?* How would you answer that question? Perhaps, the answer depend on the day that I ask it. There are those days, that as a parent, we seem to do everything right. You sit back at the end of the day, and think that I'm pretty good at this parenting thing. We overestimate ourselves. Then there are those days that we look at ourselves and think: *Where did I go wrong?* Even though you love your kids, you could string them up. We underestimate what God can do. We are thankful that hat God forgives us when we mess up as a parent.

When you first look at the parent, the mother of James and John in our text, you think: *What was she thinking? How could she be as bold as she was?* **"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him." What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."** Why would she make such a request?

Before we answer that question, let's see where this idea is coming from. It is too easy for us to judge this mother in our text. You have to back up to chapter 19 in Matthew. **"Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."** If you put their question into the context around it, then her question isn't all that bad. Jesus had already told them that they were going to be great. They didn't understand what that *greatness* in God's kingdom meant. What does Jesus do with their request? Maybe, the question should be: *What didn't Jesus do about their request?* He doesn't jump on them at all. The

other disciples were mad at James and John. But Jesus doesn't. Instead, he is going to use this occasion to teach his disciples again about greatness in the kingdom of God. **"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.**

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." None of them understood greatness. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to die. He was about to drink the cup of suffering or as Isaiah describes it: **"The cup of his (God's) wrath."** (Is. 52:17) Even though the cup that these two disciples were going to drink wasn't as strong as Jesus' cup, James would die a martyr's death. John would live out his life in exile. They were going to suffering as a result of their faith. But there was one BIG difference between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus was going to suffer for the sins of the world. He would pay for sin.

In our 2nd lesson for today, the Apostle Paul talks about what Jesus brought to this world. God's plan to save his world is really simple. **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."** The sceptic in me doesn't want to think that it is that simple. We want to compare ourselves to others, and think that we are not that bad. We want to judge others. We want to point fingers at others and blame them. We want to overestimate ourselves. Or we want to underestimate God and think that he could never forgive a sinner like me. Don't get me wrong – sin matters. Sin needed to be paid for. But it isn't us who will do the paying. It is Jesus on the cross of Calvary who will pay for my sins.

Greatness comes from God. It doesn't come from me. It comes through Jesus. Greatness doesn't come from exercising authority over someone, it comes from serving each other in Christ. Jesus says: **"Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** Give thanks that you have forgiveness in Jesus. Give thanks that the Father looks at Jesus and says to us: *Not guilty!* Amen.