



Twenty ninth Sunday Ordinary Time 2006.

Isaiah 53: 10-11 Hebrews 4:14-16 Mark 10: 35-45

I suppose if we were to look at the three readings today in search of a common theme it would be ministry.

We begin with a fragment from Isaiah, which has God rolling up the divine sleeves. This is always a prelude to getting down to work. Isaiah identifies the work of God as restoring, and healing.

In the Gospel of Mark the passage begins with another story of misunderstanding. The third prediction of the passion, like the other two, is not understood. James and John, Zebedee's sons approach Jesus. They ask for a favour. They want the choice Kingdom positions, on the left and right hand of Jesus in glory.

You will have noticed that we have a repetition of the pattern of the second passion prediction. The second was followed by the struggle for power among the disciples, here we have a similar incident.

Jesus tells the disciples that they don't know what the request implies. To be so closely allied to Jesus means taking the same path.

The two images used as requirements for the following of Jesus are striking. To drink from the same cup implies an intimacy, a willingness to be connected, come what may. It also means to accept the lot of the other.

The second image is more explicit. Discipleship implies a willingness to accept immersion in a bath of pain; the baptism of martyrdom. By the time Mark came to write his Gospel, the early communities had had experience of this demand.

The response of the two disciples is clear, but Jesus then points out that places in the kingdom are not allocated by favour. This common method of gaining positions of power has been in practice up to and including our own times.

The final scene has Jesus addressing the group who are disgruntled by the queue jumping of the brothers. Again Jesus attempts to turn the disciples' attitudes away from power as control, prestige and display.

Verse 45 could be the key to the whole Gospel. It sums up the motive for the ministry of Jesus. We are called to serve others until we are poured out, emptied, so that many will be freed from all that imprisons them.

The passage from Hebrews can be confusing. Priesthood in the Jewish tradition was conferred by birth. Jesus was not a priest but belonged to a religion that gave special status to priests and the temple cult.

Jesus stood in the prophetic line. Throughout Jewish history there had been conflict between the prophetic and priestly traditions. Jesus identified the temple with

himself, located not in one place but in the world, and his actions of preaching, healing and service were the new rites.

He claimed that authority in ministry came from the kingdom. The kingdom of God was source, context and purpose of ministry. He dared to declare that religion itself could be a source of tyranny.

The author of Hebrews was treading on dangerous ground when he used the image of *High Priest* of Jesus.

If we read carefully we can see that he was contrasting the current notion of priesthood with how Jesus lived and ministered. However many symbols of cultic priesthood have attached themselves to Jesus Christ and muddied our understanding of Jesus' vision of kingdom and ministry.

There have been many approaches to ministry over the centuries since the followers of Christ accepted the call to be ministers of the Good News, we are called to be part of shaping what is life for our times and our context.

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