

A Study in Contrasts, Part I: “When It’s All About Me”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for 1st UMC, Grand Junction, Sunday, October 20, 2024

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ website or by clicking this link and finding the date of the worship service in which it appears:
<https://www.christianworldmedia.com/wordstream/fumcgj/search:->

Scripture Text: Mark 10:35-45 [NLT]

OPENING

This is a simple, two-part series that comes right from the Gospel of Mark itself. I call it **A Study in Contrasts**. Today, we’re looking at what Mark saw fit to identify as self-absorption and unbridled ambition in followers of Christ. Hence the sermon title, “When It’s All About Me”.

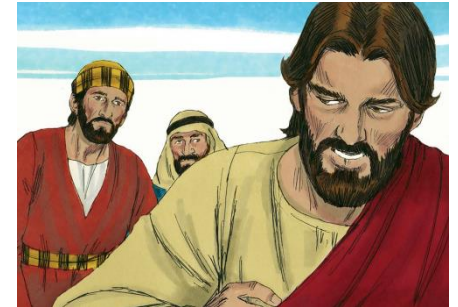
It’s not surprising that we can see ourselves and others in this narrative because self-absorption is something that is so much a part of our human nature.

We’ll get to Part II next week, “When It’s All About Wholeness”, but like going through Good Friday before celebrating Easter Sunday, we have to look at the darker side of human nature before we can fully appreciate the light that Christ sheds on our path. So, let’s take an unabashed look at the Scripture text for today.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

(*Unpack the dynamics in the text:

1. Verses 35-40
2. Then the pivot: v. 41
3. Then, the teaching: verses 42-45*)



SERMON THOUGHTS

God’s judgement and correction are sometimes seen negatively, as being somehow inconsistent with a loving God. But judgement is exactly what takes place in Mark’s recounting of this event in the lives of Jesus and His disciples.

But God’s judgement and correction, far from being negative, are **gifts** to us. Because unlike human judgement, which is sometimes intended to bury us, God’s judgement always comes with the promise of redemption!

1. As we know from Paul’s letter to the Romans, “In all things, God works for the good of those who love him...”;
2. OR in John 10, Jesus came that His sheep “might have life, and have it in abundance”;
3. OR in Hebrews 12:5-6 (referring to Proverbs 3:11-12), “...the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.”
4. And in the passage from Mark, we get the teaching from Jesus that calls out the unhealthy

self-absorption of James and John, helping them to see the need for a change of heart – for their own good, but also that which will redeem human community IF Jesus’ teaching is followed: You want to be first in the community? Then become the servant of everyone else. That not only heals the individual but elevates the community, as well.

This self-absorption is on full display in our world today – on every social media platform, in the relentless 24-hour partisan cable news networks, in election campaigns, and in so many other places. And when we hear it, we ought NOT to celebrate it.

The Gospel is here to guide us in how we would evaluate the words, behaviors, and values of those who put themselves forward for our consideration. What we prioritize in our response is up to us, but God will ask us to provide and account for our choices.

CONCLUSION

(*Reprise the Choir’s anthem from m. 21 to the end introducing it with the lyrics reflecting the contrast to “when it’s all about me”.*) The words in the last half of the Choir’s anthem remind us of Jesus’ words to the lofty dreamers, James and John: It is God’s place alone to award the prizes of faithful discipleship. The title is “Awake, My Soul” and the lyrics in the second half of the anthem read:

*’Tis God’s all animating voice
that calls thee from on high;
’Tis His own hand presents the prize
to thine aspiring eye.*

*Blest Savior introduced by Thee
have I my race begun.
And crowned with vict’ry at Thy feet
I’ll lay my honors down.
I’ll lay my honors down.*

As the writer of the book of Hebrews tells us: It is our task simply to “run with endurance the race that God has set before us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Originator and Perfecter of our faith” (Hebr. 12:1b-2a).

(*To the Choir and the reprise of the anthem.*)