

**TFTD 23.26 Thursday 23rd March 2023**

**Matthew ch.20 Who is the greatest?**



**“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favour of him.....She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” Matthew 20: 20-21**

**Today’s passage has a parallel in Mark 10 from verse 35 where it is the two sons themselves, James and John, who make this strange request of Jesus. For some reason Matthew puts the question in the mouth of their mother on their behalf.**

**We are used to the concept of pushy parents in our**

**own culture of course. Stand for two minutes on the touchline of any junior football match and you will see it in action clearly!**

**Whoever did the asking here it is clear that the other disciples are really angry about it and Jesus is none too pleased either. But it does give him the chance to state again what true greatness involves. He asks the brothers, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” He has just reminded the disciples for the third time that he is on his way to Jerusalem with them and there he will be handed over to the authorities and he will be condemned to death. And yet they are not hearing. How especially ridiculous to be asked this question now!**

**Our own ancient culture includes the old legends of King Arthur and the noble quest for the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail is the Cup which Jesus used at the Last Supper. According to the legend Joseph of Arimathea, who buried Jesus in his own tomb after the crucifixion, caught Jesus’ blood in a cup as it drained from his body on the cross. Arthur sets his knights a quest to find the Cup as a great act of devotion, loyalty and courage.**

**Our concept of greatness still today probably involves strength of character including success, fame and fortune. Many people show their “greatness” by the size of their houses and cars and what schools their children go to.**

**The request to Jesus here opens a window on the whole sordid business of power and influence - who has it and who does not?**

**As we approach Easter now we can reflect on all this ourselves. Jesus is not interested at all in his status or ours. He is focused only on his call as the Servant King in Isaiah 53 verse 12: “who bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.” He is the one who will be found washing his disciples’ feet, not lording it over them.**

**That is our model as his followers still today. We often talk about what a successful Church looks like and look back to the glory days when pews were full and the Church held sway more obviously in the community. We live in different times now, but we can still grow in faith and hope. But our signs of “success” are not seen in power and influence but in our call to serve our community and the world and to “drink the cup” with Jesus**

**and bear his cross.**

**Here are words again from Terry Hinks from  
Praying the Way:-**

**“The powerful will bow before your cross.  
You, the one who gives life and hope and love,  
Will shatter all our attempts to use you,  
To manipulate you for our own ends,  
In the power games we play,  
The bullying in the name of the Almighty,  
The claims we make for our place in heaven.  
Those who think themselves first will come in last.**

**The stumbling and disabled will win the race.  
The dumb and voiceless will shout your praise.  
The hungry and helpless will be paid in full.  
The distressed and dying will receive eternal life.  
Thank you, the one and only one,  
Beyond comparison, beyond compare.”**

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