

**Goal: That the hearers would offer requests to God seeking greatness in serving.**

If you could ask Jesus for one thing, just one thing, what would it be? If Jesus was standing here and asked: *“What do you want me to do for you?”* ([Mark 10: 36](#)) What would you say? There are probably a number of things going through your minds. Healing for a loved one you’re worried about. Peace in this murderous world. Less stress at school or at work or to spend more time with loved ones. Ok, maybe a few of you might ask for wealth or success.

James and John were given that opportunity, to ask Jesus for whatever they wanted, and they already had something in mind. (*“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him,) “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”*) ([Mark 10: 35 – 37](#)) They wanted power and authority and the greatness that came with those positions.

But before you judge them too quickly, remember that James and John, along with Peter, made up Jesus’ inner circle. They were the three Jesus took with Him up the mountain to see Him transfigured. They were the three He led further into the Garden to pray with Him before He was arrested. And since Peter had already screwed up, maybe they thought it was their chance to solidify their positions in His kingdom.

The first time Jesus told His disciples of His death, Peter rebuked Him, and Jesus responded, *“Get behind me, Satan!”* ([Mark 8:33](#)) The second time Jesus mentioned His death, the 12 started to argue which was the greatest. ([Mark 9:30–34](#)) When Jesus brings it up a third time, James and John want to settle it, once and for all. It makes sense, right? Worldly sense.

Thankfully, God doesn’t ask us that question, because I’m sure I’d screw it up. What I would ask for would probably depend on the time of the day, the day of the week, what was going on at that moment, whether I was feeling good or bad, angry or sad, and a whole bunch of other things. I’d probably just blurt out something and then regret it later. Thankfully, God doesn’t ask us, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* and that’s good for two other reasons.

First, because He tells us to pray for everything and anything, not just one thing. Jesus says, ask. ([Matthew 7:7–11](#)) Paul tells us to pray without ceasing ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)) If you need anything, then come to the One who can help. ([Luke 11:1–12](#)) Don’t give up ([Luke 18:1](#)) but pray like a child, asking their daddy, their papa, knowing He loves you and will answer give you what you need. ([Small Catechism](#)) God has given us an amazing gift in prayer, and He wants us to use it, every day, every moment, and don’t worry about messing up.

Notice that Jesus doesn’t rebuke James and John for their request. He rebuked Peter, when Peter denied the cross. But instead, Jesus corrects them and He teaches them. Your Father

loves it when you pray, even if you ask for the wrong things and He has to say no. And here's the second reason, and this is really the point of the today's reading, **GOD GIVES US WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE ASKED FOR.**

The people of Israel had really messed up. They had turned away from God and worshiped idols. They became worldly and were not the blessing to others God had called them to be. Although God sent prophet after prophet to draw them back to God, they wouldn't listen, they wouldn't repent. Ultimately, God sent them into exile for 70 years, taking away their homes and their hope, destroying their temple they placed their faith in. It was a hard, but necessary discipline, because they had broken the covenant. During those 70 years, if God had asked, *"what do you want me to do for you?"* they probably would have said: *"we want to go home"*.

So, God didn't ask. Instead, He sent Jeremiah to tell them what they needed. That their loving Father would give them a new covenant. (***Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people...For I*** One where He ***will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*** (Jeremiah 31: 31 – 34)

That's the answer for what we should have asked for. If we only had one request of Jesus, it should be, *"Forgive me, Lord, a poor miserable sinner."* Was that what you thought of at the beginning of this sermon? If you did, great! I doubt many of us did though. But that's the gift above all other gifts. Everything in this world, will go the way of decay and death, but forgiveness lasts forever. Forgiveness is why the Son of God came to our world to be our ***high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*** (Hebrews 5: 6) The forever priest who would sacrifice Himself for the life of the world, no matter when or how they lived.

So, when James and John ask for the places next to Jesus in His glory, they really don't know what they're asking. They're thinking of the greatness and glory in the way the world does things, but Jesus is going to show them greatness and glory in a way they couldn't imagine, by way of the cross. The greatness of God is revealed in how He serves mankind in suffering and dying on the cross. The glory of God is revealed in the humility of God's Son taking upon Himself our sins, our condemnation, and giving us forgiveness and life.

The world catches glimpses of this greatness in those who heroically lay down their lives for others. And the world may even hold Jesus as an example of this, that He is showing us how to sacrifice for a cause. But Jesus is much more than that. He didn't lay down His life for a cause

or to change society, He laid it down for you. Jesus is more than just an example, He's your Savior. He didn't come to show you how to do it, but to give you what you need most: forgiveness. That's Jesus' one request from the cross, ***"Father, forgive them."*** (Luke 23: 34)

That's what Jesus is all about. The healings, the miracles, even the resurrection, are all about forgiveness, undoing the effects of sin and giving eternal life to all. When you're forgiven, you have all that you need, now and forever. If we don't think of forgiveness in this way, then maybe your point of view is closer to James and John than to Jesus. And thus, we still have something to learn.

So, Jesus asks them a question, to teach them. (***"Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking." "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"*** (Mark 10: 38) How would you answer that? I guess, that's not a fair question since we know more than James and John did at that point. We'd obviously say, "yes"! We know that Jesus was baptized into our death. We know that cup Jesus was about to drink was so awful that He'd soon ask His Father to take it from Him. But Jesus transforms these things through the glory of the cross. He who is life is baptized into our death, so that we who die are baptized into His resurrection. He who is sinless drinks the cup of wrath against our sin, so that we who are sinners drink now the cup of blessing, of forgiveness. In every baptism and in every Supper, Jesus' request from the cross is fulfilled, we are forgiven.

James and John, and you and I are baptized with Jesus' baptism and we drink of His cup, but only after He transforms them from death to life for us. But those two seats at Jesus right and left, that James and John asked for? Turns out they were actually prepared for two criminals. James and John didn't know what they were asking, so it was good that Jesus didn't give them what they wanted. But what He gave them were places even greater. Places He has prepared for you too. And if Jesus has done all that for you, you are free to show that same greatness of love and forgiveness to others. (***"But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*** (Mark 10: 43 – 45)

So, these last two weeks of Lent, learn again the glory of your Savior, the glory of His love, the glory of His cross. Learn again the glory of His service and the glory that is in ours. And learn to pray as Jesus did, ***"Father, forgive me. Father, forgive them."*** Knowing His answer from the cross is, ***"It is finished. It's done!"*** In Jesus name. Amen.