

- 1) The last few months have been Canine Chaos Time in the Tucker-Schlafer household.
- Our two standard poodles usually get along quite well— they even drink muzzle to muzzle from the same water bowl.
 - But when Peggy and I come home after being away, each kicks into frenzy mode, trying to be the total focus of our attention. The little one attacks the ears of the big one—the big one roars and charges the little one.
 - Their behavior is irrational—We have affection aplenty for each dog. Their behavior is impractical—It keeps each one from getting what both want. I try to reason with them; but, for some reason, neither of them LISTENS to reason. Each seem to worry that they will LOSE if the other gets attention.
 - One is a boy poodle, the other a girl: but after hearing today's Gospel story from St. Mark, I'm tempted to rename them JAMES and JOHN.

2) What WERE James and John thinking?

- They make a “a blank check” request of Jesus—who's gonna sign off on that?
- They make this request in front of their colleagues—the angry pushback they get is inevitable.
- They've no reason to think that Jesus will treat any of His disciples like a teacher's pet.

But James and John can't seem to help themselves—any more than our two poodles can.

In the Gospel of Mark up to this point, Jesus has never talked about HIS glory; and the last thing He HAS talked about is His coming death.

Maybe that gives us a clue about where James and John are coming from.

3) Mark has just told his readers that, as the disciples walk with Jesus toward Jerusalem (QUOTE):

They were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. No surprise there—

Jesus has just reminded them for the third time that His death is fast approaching.

The unwelcome message is starting to sink in; and with it, wave upon wave of dread and fear.

How James and John react may not be rational, but it is instinctual.

Fear has a way of constricting our focus, does it not—fear makes us hunker down—

fear makes us clutch reflexively at any security that seems ready to hand.

We haven't fingers and toes enough to count the clear examples in our current culture.

You don't have to see James and John as crass political climbers, you can see them as children, masking their terror in the big kid language of power politics:

But what they mean, deep down, I think, is this: *Jesus, we're so scared! Can we sit next to you?*

4) And Jesus—quietly, calmly, I'm thinking—responds: *You don't know what you're asking.*

And I think He means this in more ways than one.

They don't know—not really—what it will cost them to stand beside him.

(Although He bluntly says they'll find out soon enough.)

But then He says something curious: that to sit on either side of Him isn't His to grant, but that it is *for those for whom it has been prepared.*

And you have to wonder: what does THAT mean?

- That those two choice places have already been secretly assigned?
THAT doesn't sound fair!
- That those two places are, literally, up for grabs—
that to the two WINNERS in the contest for "Best Humble Servant" go the prize?
That sounds like a competition with a built-in contradiction, doesn't it?

WE get to sit next to Jesus in His Glory 'cause WE served more people more humbly than YOU did!

Perhaps what Jesus has in mind—trying to sidetrack this fearful question from James and John—

perhaps what Jesus means has to do with what He says about His own life of service:

*The Son of Man came not to BE served, but TO serve—and to give His life as a RANSOM for MANY.
A ransom for many—what does THAT mean?*

5) To RANSOM someone means to invest your own resources to help set them FREE.

The image that comes most readily to mind, of course, is cash paid to a kidnapper.

But that's an extreme example—and seriously misleading.

There are other, much better examples of giving YOUR life as a ransom for MANY:

- Serving in a desperately poor neighborhood to free inhabitants from poverty and violence.
- Serving as a science teacher for girls who've been told that girls don't get to DO science.
- Serving as a mental health worker with those who suffer from PTSD.

Fill in your own examples—those whom YOU have served to secure their release.

Those who have become YOUR servants to help you gain your freedom.

Do you see what Jesus is trying to do, by deflecting and redirecting the paranoia of James & John?

He's trying to help them learn to see life from a totally different point of view.

If they can shift their vision from *who controls from above* to *who serves from within*—

then a seeming paradox regarding power becomes both rational and practical:

Trying to defend our "freedom," out of fear of the other—that's mutually enslaving—

But, in voluntary service of one another, we set each other free.

6) James and John see a "high" table, with only two seats next to the One on top.

Jesus draws a very different table picture:

A table where He is at the center, with equal, direct, and immediate access to all around it.

At the center—from which flows His service to each—and all—of us.

At the center—freeing us to de-center ourselves from the crippling fear that:

it's all ABOUT me, but there's not enough FOR me; so I have to fight for my piece of the pie.

NO, says Jesus, The Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom—for MANY.

7) Let's draw the picture closer home:

In the past four weeks we have been privileged to conduct three baptisms:

For Henrick, Anna, and today, for Patrick.

If we were to be held captive in the competition table world of James and John,

the only question we could ask is:

"Which of these three children has to take a seat further away from Jesus?"

In response to THAT question, I hear Jesus saying: *What a SILLY question!*

Each of these children will face all kinds of freedom-threatening forces.

Those forces will have to be addressed with energy, patience, and imagination—
by their parents, their immediate families, and by [all of us] their family in faith.
But their baptism, and our renewal of our baptismal vows, sends a clear, strong signal:
Come what may, we are ransomed already. Jesus has freed us—and freed us to serve.
SO—Let us now baptize Patrick Michael into freedom like THAT!