

St Andrew's Barnt Green and St Michael's Cofton Hackett given by MaryAnn Keyes, Reader in Ledbury Parish
October 17th 2021

Hebrews 5:1-10 Mark 10:35-45

'Pencil thoughts'...is a church community reflected in a collection of pencils in a case?
Different colours, lengths, some sharp, some blunt, used in different ways,...

Thank you...

And Lesley thank you for the pencil analogy.....

I wonder if you have an immediate idea of what kind of pencil you are...or your friends or a family member (it's often easier to characterise someone other than ourselves, isn't it!) When we look at the gospel stories we can see that the first followers of Jesus, the 12 disciples, were also a pretty mixed bunch. I wonder what sort of pencils each of them might be in your imagination! And what about James and John, the sons of Thunder? We certainly get a glimpse of their thinking in the passage today. They are certainly not shy of asking Jesus for positions of huge privilege! As well as putting themselves forward, they also seem to be pushing the others backwards.... Note that there is only room for two, in their thinking, alongside Jesus: what do you think they expect the other disciples to be doing? Maybe we aren't surprised when we come to the part in our passage where we hear that the other disciples were 'indignant' when they heard about the request. On the other hand, let's look at the context of the conversation... Remember....*They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.* They knew, because Jesus had told them, that He expected to be put to death in Jerusalem. Most of his followers were nervous at least about the future. So what **were** James and John thinking? Were they Pushy and uncaring? Or Brave (if foolish)? Or just Impetuous?

Whatever their motivation, Jesus, typically, answers the brothers with a further question.

Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

Now, with the benefit of hindsight, we know that the cup Jesus will drink is the suffering on the cross, which he begs His father to take away when he prays so desperately and earnestly in Gethsemane. The baptism he refers to may mean his dedication of his whole life to God, or His death on the cross death leading to His resurrection, which we symbolise when we baptise someone at the start of their Christian life. Either way, Jesus challenges James and John – OK, you want to sit with me in glory, and enjoy the privilege and responsibility of leadership in the Kingdom. **But** this involves real and painful and costly sacrifice. We get the idea from Jesus, and elsewhere in Scripture, that his 'glory' is actually when he hangs on the cross – this is where we first see His true Kingship. There's no escaping that for Jesus, glory is achieved through suffering, and

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suffering is an integral part of this fallen world.... Indeed as he says in John's gospel, in this world we will have tribulation.

I am privileged to be a Granny. My elder granddaughter, Martha, is nearly two and a half and her parents and I were agreeing the other day it's a tough age for everyone! The terrible twos are a time of frequent tantrums about nothing – the lego which won't fit together, the favourite pyjama top being in the wash, the bit of yoghurt spilled on the table.... You may know what I am talking about!! Coming to terms with the 'imperfection' of life is a daily battle for her – and I'm guessing for all of us. Martha's Dad, my son, when he was that sort of age used to wail frequently.....'But I didn't WANT it to be like that'. I think that if we could chat to James and John we might find this is their problem. They have spent three years on the road with Jesus, and heard what he says about love and commitment to others, as well as his predictions about his coming sufferings. It's not that they haven't heard what He says, it's just they don't want it to be true. and I know exactly how they feel.

It's the most human desire imaginable, to have good things without cost or pain, isn't it? To avoid the difficult patches, the downsides of life? There are plenty of proverbs about it! "You have to take the rough with the smooth; Into each life some rain must fall, The gem cannot be polished without friction..... " Life has its ups and downs – but we would much rather it were all 'ups'

So perhaps we should be grateful to James and John – and to the indignant disciples! - for provoking Jesus to explain! He wants them – and us - to know that his followers must accept some element of His cup and His baptism. That true discipleship is marked by an acceptance that there is suffering in the world – although we 'don't want it to be like that'. And, what's more, Jesus expects us to show a readiness to accept suffering and sacrifice on behalf of others, to offer service ...actually to act as slavesto others. Which would be extremely harsh, but for one thing. Jesus is not pushing us along in front of him, sending us into danger and suffering and pain on our own. Jesus leads totally by example. His sacrifice, his pain, his suffering all come before ours. The reading we heard from Hebrews further emphasises this. Our High Priest, who is also our friend and brother as well as our saviour, Jesus, knows what it is to plead with God to escape suffering. This is what He was doing for those hours in Gethsemane. He pleaded, and God the Father could have saved him from death – but the answer was 'no'. When Jesus said 'Your will not mine', he accepted that suffering was part of the package

Our sacrifices and suffering will never be those of Jesus. Maybe you don't think you have ever faced any suffering – or maybe you have, and are, facing many. Maybe you don't think you've ever had to make any significant sacrifice – or maybe you have, or

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are, sacrificed greatly for God. In either case, if you are like me you probably find yourself often thinking – or shouting at God - the equivalent of 'I didn't want it to be like this'! Maybe for yourself, or for others in the world. I felt like that the other night hearing of the tragic death of Sir David Amess. But to be true followers of Jesus means being at least willing to try to walk in His footsteps – and we are reminded today that His footsteps lead through the darkness of Good Friday before they get to the glory and joy of Easter.

If we return to the pencil analogy – what is the one thing that all pencils have in common, if they are any use as pencils? They must be able to make a mark, which they only do by sacrificing a bit of themselves to the paper. If we follow Jesus, let us pray that we may truly follow His example and be willing to sacrifice ourselves in whatever way He asks, sustained by His promise that He has gone ahead of us and will also be with us always. Amen.