

Lent 5B: Jesus came to give us everything we need not whatever we ask

1. Think for a moment if we had God in a box...God on a leash...God at our beck and call. You might cringe at the very thought, “Oh now pastor I’d never want that!”
 - a. And yet look at James and John, two of the three closest disciples of our Lord
 - i. They were there on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter
 - ii. Peter, James, and John will be with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
 - iii. Yet it is they who crassly approach our Lord in our Gospel lesson and say, **“We want you to do for us whatever we ask.”**
 - iv. How could they have gone off the rails so badly? Where did they get such audacity? Don’t you feel better about yourself in light of their example?
 - b. Well let’s not break our arms patting ourselves on the back quite yet
 - i. Our bumbling Apostles may not be so different from us after all
 - ii. We’ve all heard about making deals with the devil, selling your soul for some earthly gain like knowledge, talent, wealth, or power
 - iii. But how many of us have tried to strike a bargain with God?
 - iv. Maybe not overtly demanding something as the apostles did but with the same intent, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.
 - c. Think about how we often approach God in prayer
 - i. Unlike the apostles we make it sound so innocent, we’re not asking for our benefit – we tell ourselves and God that what we’re asking for will work for His glory.
 - ii. Maybe your loved one or friend is sick in the hospital, to the point of death and we start making deals...offers so good even God can’t refuse
 - iii. “If you heal him or her not for my sake or even theirs just think of the glory that you’ll receive, no one thought that they’d live – they’d have to call it a miracle.” – or “if this can work out financially just think how much I’ll be able to give to the church or missions...etc!”
 - iv. Whatever our end goal we manage to convince God that our will is His will, but there’s always a quid pro quo, “If you do this one thing for me I promise I’ll...”
 - d. At various times we all want God in our little box, controlled for our benefit, like the apostles we want Him to do whatever we ask
 - i. Like the little kid who knows he has his big brother around to fix things or get him out of jams, “You just wait...”
 - ii. And God’s like that big brother’s just waiting for you to call him to do your bidding
 - iii. Sometimes we even try to use our faith as leverage to move God.
 - iv. I got this from a very well know ministry here in America, **“Your obedience in moving forward -- to take risks and step out in faith – will release God’s power in your life.”**
 - v. Again, we’re trying to manipulate God, our obedience demands His action

2. Isn't it amazing that we can fool ourselves into thinking that we have that kind of power? Apparently, James and John did.
 - a. They didn't even try to make their request sound as unselfish as ours, "**Grant us to sit one on your right hand and one on your left.**"
 - i. They're not talking about how good their deal will be for Jesus or for the kingdom, nope it's all about them
 - ii. They didn't pull any punches with their request, just base self-interest.
 - iii. At least you've got to appreciate their honesty
 - b. I had a conversation with another pastor back in New England from a different denomination who lamented what his denomination taught about "God's will"
 - i. His church believed, like the example noted earlier, that if you step out in faith enough God will grant your wish (like a genie in a bottle)
 - ii. Then his cousin got cancer and he prayed and prayed and she prayed and prayed and **they were sure** it was God's will to heal her because she was a believer - and she died
 - iii. And as we sat he said, "You know when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane He said, 'Let this cup pass from me but not my will but yours be done...in the Lord's Prayer we pray, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"
 - iv. "Are we sure we're not praying my will when we ask God to do what we want him to do, how do I know it's His will to heal them?"
 - c. We so much want our will to be done that we can imagine our will is His will
 - i. That's because in this world the only one we can really trust to look after our interests is us, sometimes we can't even depend on our families to do it for us
 - ii. We're so used to getting our way by hook or by crook, that we'll get what we want from God or at least a comfortable compromise
 - iii. But the problem is that this flies in the face of the first commandment, "**You shall have no other gods.**" – not even yourselves.
 - iv. As we learn from the meaning of the first commandment, "**We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.**"
3. Our Lord wasn't in the deal making business, He didn't consult us regarding what He came to do - Jesus came to give us everything we need NOT whatever we ask.
 - a. Listen to His reply to the brothers, He asks, "**Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?**"
 - i. In our reading right before the brothers make their demand Jesus told the apostles that He was going to Jerusalem to be handed over to death and that after three days He would rise again. (Mk 10:34)
 - ii. The Son of God gave up all that was His naturally: glory, majesty, power.
 - iii. All of this He set aside for our benefit not His – only to reveal His true power and glory through weakness and humility by dying on the cross for us, that was the cup He would drink...that was the baptism He would endure.

- iv. Confirming for us what was first said through Isaiah, **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** (Isa 55:8-9)
- b. The apostles were thinking like sinful humans
 - i. In this world those who have power, or access to power like James and John thought they had through Jesus, use it for their benefit usually at the expense of others.
 - ii. But Jesus came to show you how God’s world works when He told them, **“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.”** (Mk 10:44-45)
 - iii. Because God Himself didn’t seek His glory or His benefit first, but ours, we have been freed from the endless pursuit of self-interest.
- c. You’ve already been guaranteed a place in heaven prepared for you by Christ that will exceed anything you could ask or imagine on earth.
 - i. Through His life, death, and resurrection you have been elevated to sit with the Lord – you already have everything!
 - ii. Listen to Paul in Eph, **“even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,”**
- d. How can you achieve more than you’ve already been given?
 - i. It’s so easy for us to slip into a prayer life that sounds a lot like the Apostles’, **“We want you to do for us whatever we ask,”**
 - ii. But our Lord didn’t come to give us anything we ask here because our inheritance is in heaven.
 - iii. Rather He has given us everything we need through His life, death, and resurrection that we might experience the joy of heaven forever!