Matthew 20:21 He said to her, “What do you want?’

It is clear. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. You need to grasp that this is his last trip, at least for a little while. Jesus knows that. Jesus knows what is going to happen. He knows the events that will transpire and the events that will result in exactly what He tells His disciples. Again listen to what Jesus tells them.

**“Look, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and experts in the law, and they will condemn him to death. They will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, flog, and crucify him. On the third day he will be raised.”**

Do you hear those words? This is not a prediction, and in a way I even object to this being called a “prophecy.” This is what Jesus, the Son of God, the fullness of God’s being dwelling bodily in Christ knows! This is what is going to happen! He is going to be arrested. He is going to be condemned to death by the religious leadership of the Jews. The Jews are going to hand him over to the Romans. There will be mockery, flogging and death. Not any ordinary death, but the death of the vile criminal. The death that the Romans reserved for the worst of the worst, and never their own citizens: crucifixion!

I don’t know, but I am thinking that had I been in that group of people, among the disciples of Jesus, what Jesus has just said would be on my mind and would fill me with questions and trepidations. So far, my experience as a disciple has shown that Jesus knows things. He knows how to calm wind and waves. He knows how to heal the sick and almost every physical difficulty, including death. He has power to cause the fish that you catch to have money in them! The guy walks on water! So when my teacher and Master, a person I recognize at this point as the Son of God, tells me that such and such is going to happen, I should pay attention!

And yet it is like his disciples and those around him don’t even hear him! Has Satan blocked their ears? In truth, as far as I can ascertain, Jesus has been trying to get his disciples to grasp this truth for perhaps the last 6 months! But they don’t seem to get it! They seem wrapped up in their own lives, their own thoughts, their very, dare I say it, lack of trust in Jesus! One would expect that with such words, every single person who heard this statement would be blurting out question after question and trying to figure out exactly what they should expect! You are going to be arrested? You are going to be condemned to death? For what? Healing and miracles? You are going to be crucified? Lord, I don’t’ understand all of this, please tell me more and tell me what I should do! But again, it is like they don’t hear?

Do you see what does happen? Do you know where the conversation will go? Here comes the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee and it is clear from her actions, from the very way she approaches Jesus that she has something on her mind! Jesus let’s her bring her requests with the simple question: **“What do you want?”** That will be our theme today as we explore the events of our text and even ask ourselves that question on a spiritual plane.

Again, bear in mind that this woman approaches Jesus, as far as we can determine, right after Jesus has made this incredible statement concerning the immediate future. Did she have questions about what would be? Did she have concerns about how she, a follower of Jesus, the mother of two very close associates of Jesus should handle this trauma that Jesus has laid out? No, she comes with earthly and worldly concerns. She comes totally oblivious to what Jesus has just said. She comes and she asks Jesus: **“Promise that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and one on your left hand.”**

Now honestly, I would like to put the best construction on this question. I would like to think that this mother heard what Jesus said, grasped fully and truly the last part of that revelation of Jesus that Jesus would be raised from the dead, and in that regard understood and grasped that Jesus would thus be revealed as the King of kings and Lord of Lord over all the earth and that was the basis for what she asked, but I cannot. I cannot because of the response of Jesus to her. **“You do not know what you are asking.”**

I wonder, dear People, in our religious life, in our relationship with our God and Lord, how many times Jesus would have to say the same thing to us? **“You do not know what you are asking.”** This or that situation arises and we pray to God telling Him what he should do as we see fit. Or we look at situations that are way beyond our grasp and understanding and we dare to pronounce that God just doesn’t know what he is doing! I say that because I know that in my life I can say, “I am guilty. Guilty of asking foolishness from God. Guilty of putting my own needs, wants and desires before the wisdom and will of God. Guilty of thinking I have a better handle, a clearer vision of the way things should be than the Lord God himself.” I have done that not only in what I have prayed to God but I have especially done that in the way I have lived and conducted my life before God.

God’s Word reminds us, “Don’t tempt the Lord your God.” I have. Think of all the dumb things we have done and don’t you just marvel that you are still here? We are encouraged, “Don’t be afraid.” But I have been. And in that fear I have forgotten God’s love and care for me and his gracious promises that put any and all trials in this life to shame. We are told, “Trust in the Lord and lean not on your own wisdom.” But I thought I was wiser, I have judged God as foolish and wrong in “what He let happen” and I failed in the very faith God has called me to have. What sad and terribly inept followers of Jesus we are. We just don’t know, don’t know what we should and could know because we just don’t pay attention to what Jesus says and reveals for our eternal souls sake. And as I contemplate all of this is dawns on me that the root of the matter is in that very first question of Jesus to this woman….**”What do you want?”**

**“What do you want?”** What is the purpose of your faith? What is it that is foremost in your mind as you proclaim yourself a follower and disciple, a believer in Jesus? Are you looking for God to meet all your desires and needs, for God to prove his love to you, for God to make your life smooth and without challenge or trial? Are you looking for God to guard and protect while you go out and with reckless abandon immerse yourself in the ways and desires of the world? What do you want? Peace? Happiness? Security? Greatness? Riches? Have we asked ourselves this great question, this probing question of faith?

Do you even know what you should want?

In our text, we have this mother, and her sons, who in a moment of total foolishness and selfishness, petition Jesus for positions of honor, power and prestige. And the sons were involved. Notice that Jesus asks: **“Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”** It was the sons who answered! With utter boldness and the blindness of the world before them they declare: **“We are.”** But they don’t even know what the cup is? They don’t grasp that the cup is eternal death and damnation for the sins of the world. The cup is the agony of crucifixion, the physical agony and pain associated with his crucifixion, even the wrath and anger of the Father for all the sins of the world. The cup is the stinging knowledge that your disciples will desert and abandon you even though they all will say they would die with him. Their answer is the utterance of their ignorance and yet look how bold they are.

By the way, Jesus tells them they will indeed **“drink my cup.”** By that Jesus means they will in their life suffer for the name and faith in Jesus they will have. They will be persecuted, hated, despised and with the exception of one, they would all die as martyrs for the name of Jesus. I like that Jesus takes their foolish answer and tells them what will be. And what will be will be difficult.

And then Jesus will teach an awesome lesson of true faith. This lesson is caused because now the other ten guys are put off by this request of momma and sons. Listen to what Jesus tells all of them: **“You know that the rulers of the Nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It will not be that way among you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but so serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

We are to be servants, slaves to our fellow believers. We are to be imitators of Jesus, lights that shine with His wisdom, branches of His Vine that bear great fruit, those who walk in His Way, voices that speak with His truth, sheep that follow the voice of our Shepherd…you know I could go on and on this way. Our lives are to be linked, intimately linked with Jesus. Because when our lives are linked with Jesus then in truth, we know what it is that we have. We know what it is to give our all just for the name of Jesus. And we then grasp some simple facts.

You want peace? Stop looking for it in the world. Stop relying on your material goods and comfort, your beautifully paneled houses and bright shiny cars. The true peace of this world is found in Jesus. In the fact that he has paid for your sins and that by faith in Him you have the eternal and true promise of life and salvation. Your sins are paid for and forgiven in Jesus. In Jesus you do have peace. The true peace that can only be found in the core message of Jesus….He is your Savior and God! Jesus cares for you and loves you and no matter what physical trials come your way, you know that Jesus will not allow any of them to be a weapon to your spiritual harm. Yes, you have peace, true peace in Jesus.

You want happiness? Oh how many times I have heard people foolishly say, “I have a right to be happy…” And in most cases they are crying for that right while chasing the fickleness and foolishness of the world. True happiness is found in Jesus. In the fact that through his promises and victories I have nothing to worry about and no fears before me. No matter what happens, God in Jesus is with me! Sickness, health, better or worse, wind and waves or smooth sailing, God is with me and bringing into my life exactly what is necessary for my eternal good and welfare. What could make a person happier than that? I am in the hand of God in every year, month, week, day, hour and breath that I take! I know the true happiness that only faith in God can bring.

You want security? You want to feel safe and at peace? Jesus! He gives it all. Even in the midst of stormy sea or crumbling mountains Jesus is right there! That is the very message of one of my favorite Psalms. Psalm 46 says to us: **God is our refuge and strength, a helper who can always be found in times of trouble. That is why we will not fear when the earth dissolves and when the mountains tumble into the heart of the sea….Be still, and know that I am God.”** That is security!

Or is it greatness you want? In Jesus is the greatness of the universe and galaxies. In Jesus we find our treasure and hope, our confidence and calm. In Jesus are all the answers and wisdom, the marvel and wonder, the power and majesty of God that He shares with us. He promises we will be heir of eternal life and co-heirs, co-rulers with him in His forever and eternal kingdom. There is no greater greatness than that which is revealed in Jesus.

Do you want to be rich? You are in Jesus. You have the treasure of God, that precious blood of the Lamb of God who has purchased your soul and redeemed you for salvation. You have something that gold and silver, worldly wealth can never buy. Jesus the true treasure and ticket to eternal life. What could be more precious?

By the way, did you notice in our text how Jesus skillfully tries to direct his disciples, these squabbling followers, back to what is essential and needed? It is true, they were wrapped up in a worldly point of view. So Jesus directs them to be servants and slaves to one another. Why? **“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** In those words Jesus is trying to lead them back to how this conversation got started. To the fact that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders and the Romans. His life would be a ransom. His life would pay the price of our sins, pay for our entrance into God’s kingdom and pay for all the peace, happiness, security and greatness we could ask for. Jesus our treasure. Jesus our ransom. Jesus our Savior. Jesus, God and Lord for us.

And now go back and look again at all that Jesus said at the beginning. Do you see how He told them it would end? That’s right, **“On the third day he will be raised.”** That’s the heart and core of it all. Jesus will be raised from the dead. Because of that resurrection all of us will know that Jesus is true God and Lord who gives us the greatest gift of all: forgiveness and eternal life with Him.

So, we started out by focusing on the depth probing question of Jesus: **“What do you want?”** My answer is: I just want to know and have Jesus in my life. He is everything! And with Him there is nothing ever to fear. Amen.