

Mrs. Zebedee, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. PE080511
Acts 2:1-21 and Matthew 20:20-29
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I have had particular pleasure during this past year in watching our two daughters become mothers. They have taken on the role of motherhood well. They have demonstrated compassion, patience, and nurture. I carefully add that they have had great support from their equally-nurturing husbands! My pleasurable moments come when I watch my grandchildren being rocked, comforted, dressed, fed, and played with. Some of my pleasure comes in knowing that they are imitating the nurturing qualities of their own mother.

Mother's Day, one of the highest holy days of the secular year, is a day to celebrate those nurturing qualities. There are a number of mothers in the Bible. We think of Sarah, Rebekah, Elizabeth, and Mary. Some of them are outstanding nurturing characters. The Levite mother of Moses, for instance, risked her life for her son by making a basket of reeds and wood tar and floating the baby into the care of the Pharaoh's daughter. Rebekah, on the other hand, set her two sons against each other as adversaries.

Let me introduce you this morning to Mrs. Zebedee. We find her in Matthew. She had two sons, James and John. They were, according to the Gospel writer, the number three and number four disciples to give up their fishing nets and follow Jesus. I am not sure what to make of Mark's report that Jesus named these two sons of Zebedee "Boanerges," or "Sons of Thunder," but I have a good idea.

Mrs. Zebedee appears to be a mother who will do anything for her two sons. I would note here that it is not necessarily a good thing that a mother will do anything for her children. That can create lazy, irresponsible, and self-centered lugs. Ask any teacher. What we do for our children must take into consideration the welfare of others and what kind of citizens of the world we are creating.

Here is what Mrs. Zebedee did. She proudly grabbed her two strapping sons and marched them up to Jesus. She got down on her knees, looked up into Jesus' face, and said, "I have a favor to ask of you."

Jesus asked, "What do you want?"

Mrs. Zebedee replied, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

That would make a mother proud: to have her children seated in a royal court, decked in finery and having some beautiful girls popping grapes into their mouths. They would not have to dig up soil, plant seeds, cut grain, shovel manure, drive a tractor, or complete a task list for their bosses. Did Mrs. Zebedee pick up James' and John's socks and toys after them? Did she make them clean up their rooms? In making this request, was Mrs. Zebedee seeking vicarious glory through her sons? That is something parents do in error. They hope to right their own failures through the success of their children. We find that in parents who push their daughters into beauty contests or into cheerleading and in parents who short-circuit childhood with academic or athletic pressure.

The world is not all about *my* children. They are not the center of the universe. There were ten other disciples standing nearby who watched this scene with Jesus and Mrs. Zebedee. You know what they felt when Mrs. Zebedee made her request right in front of them. They were angry! This is how to destroy group cohesiveness! Team spirit is squelched by the undeserved

special attention given to two of the members in front of the others.

Mrs. Zebedee was so preoccupied with herself and her two sons that she completely missed what Jesus had just told his disciples. She got down on her knees and made her request to Jesus just after he said that he was going to be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes to be condemned to death, mocked, flogged and crucified; and on the third day raised.¹ Jesus said, “I’m going to be killed.”

Mrs. Zebedee asked, “Then when you get to heaven, will you put one of my sons on your right and the other on your left?” This is the height of insensitivity. The one positive thing we can say about Mrs. Zebedee is that she recognized that Jesus had authority in the kingdom of God, a kingdom quite different from the kingdoms of this world.

Jesus was looking for his disciples to follow him to their own crosses in proclaiming God’s kingdom on earth. Jesus knew his life was in danger because he was proclaiming the Kingdom of God in the face of Pilate and the Roman soldiers who lived the kingdom of Caesar who called himself a god. This was a domination system, one of many in effect in the history of humanity where wealth and power are amassed by a few at the cost of the many. We Christian parents and church teachers, need to teach our children Jesus’ ways.

Parents, teachers, and confirmands, hear these words. Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God. He was a threat to Caesar and to the leaders of the temple domination system. In the kingdom of God, according to Jesus, God is a loving father, not a judge. God loves all children, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight.² God wants all of his children to be treated in a fair and just way: God wants all of his children to have enough to eat.

In his dialogue with the disciples and Mrs. Zebedee, Jesus said, “the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.”³ It is no easy thing to follow Jesus. When we preach the kingdom of God as Jesus did, we also will be a threat to those in power in this world. Consequently, our very lives will be in danger.

Confirmands, you know what you are getting into. You will not necessarily get to sit on the right and left of Jesus in glory. You are asked to follow Jesus to his death. You are to serve, not to be served, and you will serve in the name of Jesus Christ. This is what you are getting yourselves into by confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

¹Matt. 20:18-19

²“Jesus Loves the Little Children” Words: C. H. Woolston 1856-1927, music:George F. Root 1820-1895

³Matthew 20:28