

Isaiah 53:4-8a ~ Mark 10: 35-45 (The Message Bible)
The Road to 'Glory'
 October 21, 2018 ~ Service of Healing & Wholeness
 The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

Write it down. If you don't want to forget something, it's a good idea to write it down. I know that's true for my increasingly unreliable memory. It was also true for Bert and Ethel, a married couple who were getting on in years. Ethel started finding that Bert had left the butter in the cabinet where the plates go. And then she discovered the bowls she couldn't find, in the freezer. Bert started noticing Ethel taking extra turns as she drove the familiar route from grocery store to home. And so they decided together they'd better start writing down notes for each other, acknowledging that their memories were both slipping a bit. "Yes, let's write notes to help us remember the things we need to do."

One night as they were watching television together, Ethel asked Bert if he could go into the kitchen and get her some dessert. "Write this down on the pad of paper on the table there. I'd like a bowl of vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce on it. Write it down." Bert said, "Don't be ridiculous, I don't need to write *that* down. You're taking this too far." And so he went into the kitchen to get her the ice cream, and she kept watching T.V. He was gone several minutes, and then she started hearing kitchen cabinets opening, and the clatter of pots and pans. This went on for quite awhile. At last he returned with a tray and on it was a steaming plate of ham and eggs, and on his face was a gleaming smile of accomplishment. Ethel took one look at the tray and said to Bert, "I told you to write it down, because I knew you'd forget the toast."

This was a story I heard Sister Joan Chittister tell a week ago when I attended a lecture she gave in Cincinnati on "The Search for the Common Good." Her question to us that day, and one I hear our text asking us today is this: What are we forgetting that Jesus taught us? What are we forgetting that would change the course of our lives and our world if only we remembered? Given the mess we've made of this world, and all the ways we tie ourselves up in knots, we must be forgetting something far more important than vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce.

This whole section of Mark's Gospel, since Mark 8:27, since Jesus began his trip with the disciples from Caesarea Philippi in the north to Jerusalem in the south, slowly making their inexorable journey toward the cross, he has been giving them what could be called a crash course in discipleship. And if today's lesson sounded like something you've heard recently here in worship, you are right. Actually we've heard this lesson from Jesus three times already in chapter 9 and 10:

- *Whoever wants to be first **must be last of all** and servant of all. (9.35)*
- *But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and **whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.** (9.44)*
- *But many who are first will be last, and **the last will be first.** (10.31)*

Today's story is the fourth time Jesus has taken a crack at this in Mark's gospel. But this time, given the strange juxtaposition of James and John asking for privileged positioning in heaven, immediately after Jesus repeats his passion prediction, Jesus' measured response is striking. You might imagine if it was you or I, we might say to James and John, "Are you kidding me? Did you hear anything that I have said? It's not about reserving seats of honor later, it's about humble service here, now, you knuckleheads." Of course Jesus never talks that way to his seemingly bumbling, almost cartoonish disciples in this scene. Instead he listens, engages them in conversation, gently redirects their ideas about greatness and glory, onto a different path, as we heard from TMB, *"You've observed that when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you"* (v. 42-43).

What way is it with us, now? We're pretty good about forgetting Jesus' redirect regarding the path of greatness, or the road to 'glory'. Jesus' path starts with humility and leads to a cross. In the 6th century, 500 years after Christ walked this earth, Benedict of Nursia wrote some rules for his monastic community to live by. They have come to be known as the Rule of St. Benedict. Among them was a section that outlined "Twelve steps of humility." Yes, the monks had trouble with this one too. Three of those steps I want to lift up for us today. Three steps on the road to "glory" Jesus style:

- *Acknowledge faults and strip away the masks.*
- *Listen.*
- *Never ridicule anyone or anything.¹*

Just yesterday, now over 2000 years since Jesus walked this earth, and 1500 years since St. Benedict wrote his Rule, I spied at the Sabin House on the campus of Lawrence University, the hub of spiritual life and interfaith campus ministry at Lawrence, a large poster framed and hanging in the main room as you enter the house. At the top it reads, *"Spiritual and religious practice is welcomed and encouraged here. Our campus community includes persons who have diverse religious and spiritual practices and beliefs. We ask that you observe the following etiquette so that everyone feels welcome in this private/public space.*

All eight offer important guidelines (or rules) for respectful, open conversation between people of differing backgrounds and beliefs. But it was the final one that caught my eye in the context of today's gospel text and this sermon. It reads:

- **"STEP UP/STEP BACK:** Some people participate by speaking up while others participate by listening. It is important for everyone to have opportunity to step up in conversation and for those who step up frequently to step back."

There was another like it that read:

- **"SHARE, DON'T SHOVE:** We encourage you to share your questions and your convictions with the intent to explore and understand rather than to convert or convince."

These rules spell out for us how we can practice Jesus' call to humility.

“Step up/Step Back; Share/don’t shove”: Just think if we followed these two in all our political conversations in this final stretch toward the midterm elections on November 6. We might actually hear something new and important from another person we would otherwise dismiss. And others may find themselves able to hear what you have to say, as well. Here’s our challenge: when we hear political rhetoric that riles us, resist the temptation to over react. Instead, remember the ridiculous request of James and John, and Jesus’ measured response. Then take a breath, and let God lead your next move, ask yourself is it time to step up or step back? Whatever you do, remember to “Share, don’t shove.” You have the power to change the course, even reverse the direction of the conversation.

Perhaps you find it easier to remember Kevin King’s interception on Monday night, rather than this Bible story. King’s interception can help us with the message of this sermon too. Yes, I’m talking about the interception of Green Bay Packers cornerback Kevin King, late in the fourth quarter on third down with the San Francisco 49ers driving for the potential game-winning points last Monday night. King intercepted C.J. Beathard’s deep pass to receiver Marquise Goodwin at the Packers’ 10-yard line. I’ve read that this was the perfect time for his first career interception. How did he do it? Apparently King retreated, stayed in position, turned his head around and saw the flash of the ball.ⁱⁱ

Jesus came to intercede, to intercept, if you will, for all of us from the road of hate, the road of sin and separation from God and from Divine Love, to turn our lives around even at the 10 yard line. Not only each of us, but more importantly to turn the whole world around from death and destruction. *Our King, Christ the King, the Lamb of God, calls us to a different road. Again and again he taught, told, was tried and crucified to reverse our mindset from attainment to atonementⁱⁱⁱ: **At-one-ment** with God and all creation. How? By stepping back, to step up. The road of stepping back to step up in the name of the One who, “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:6 NRSV)*

I will end with a story from the Desert Fathers, “about a young monk who asked one of the old men of the desert why it is that so many people came out to the desert to seek God and yet most of them gave up after a short time and returned to their lives in the city.

“The old monk told him, ‘Last evening my dog saw a rabbit running for cover among the bushes of the desert and he began to chase the rabbit, barking loudly. Soon other dogs joined in the chase, barking and running. They ran a great distance and alerted many other dogs. Soon the wilderness was echoing the sounds of their pursuit but the chase went on into the night. After a little while, many of the dogs grew tired and dropped out. A few chased the rabbit until the night was nearly spent. By morning, only my dog continued the hunt. Do you understand,. the old

man said, 'what I have told you?' 'No,' replied the young monk, 'please tell me father.' 'It is simple," said the desert father, 'my dog saw the rabbit.'^{iv}

Have you seen the rabbit? That is, have you glimpsed God's glorious Healing Light? I think you have. That may be why you are here. Perhaps it was a fleeting glimpse. But that is enough to keep us on the road. That is why we keep coming here to worship. We need to be reminded that "it's not going to be that way with us." Here in this place, we see the symbols that remind us of Jesus' unique road to 'glory.' Glory that involves suffering and sacrifice. Glory that calls for humility at every step. Glory not just for one, but also for all. What symbols am I talking about? Take a look around; we see the baptismal font, of death to life; the bitter cup, Jesus' blood, the cup of salvation; the cross where Jesus chose to suffer and die for us. And then be raised in three days. This is the One who showed us how to step up/step back, how to Share/Don't Shove: serving God and God alone. Can we remember that?

ⁱ Joan Chittister, *A Little Rule for Beginners*, (Erie, PA: Benetvision, 2018), 15.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.packersnews.com/story/sports/nfl/packers/2018/10/16/kevin-king-interception-green-bay-packers-make-big-play-just-soon-enough/1652757002/>

ⁱⁱⁱ This phrase "from attainment to atonement" was created by Dan Crump, Ruling Elder at FPC, in conversation with me around this text.

^{iv} <https://jesseleeproject.com/2010/05/15/chasing-the-rabbit/>