A Different Kind of Glory

a sermon for Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost, October 20, 2024
by Rev. Melody Duncan-Hales
Focus Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

Good morning, St. Andrew's friends – and thank you so much for the invitation to share with you in exploring the gospel lesson today. My name is Rev. Melody Duncanson Hales, and I serve you and others throughout Canadian Shield and Shining Waters Regions in the area of Stewardship Support. While I'm disappointed that I cannot worship with you in person today, I'm grateful for the gifts of technology that allow us to be together virtually.

Friends – won't you pray with me and for me?

Gracious and loving God, we come before you with open hearts, seeking your wisdom and grace. As we meditate on your word, we ask that you guide us in humility and service. May your Spirit move among us, challenging us to embrace your call to a different kind of glory – one marked by generosity, compassion, and love. Let these words not just be spoken, but lived, as we follow Jesus' example of selfless service. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our teacher and guide. Amen.

A million years ago I was a student minister serving in at St. James United in St. John's Newfoundland, a long way from my home in Northern Ontario. Life was busy in that city church, a new experience for me who had been raised in a small rural congregation. My supervising minister was 'old school' and *very* clear on his expectations for a student minister. I was to show up, prepared, ready to work: to learn and listen, to lead and preach and offer pastoral care – and attend meetings. There were a lot of meetings. And my life was very full with lots of adventure, workdays lasting twelve or fourteen hours. Did I mention the meetings?

I remember a phone call home to my dad, a farmer on the west end of Manitoulin. I was complaining. "Dad, I am working so hard! No one seems to notice!" My father was keen to my complaint; he knew me very well as the kid who loved the gold star stickers, the well-done pats on the back. "Listen, Melody," he said. "Get this through your head right now. You are there to serve them, they are not there to serve you. Also, you don't get to complain about your work until you've been pulling a calf out for longer than three hours." I don't think I've ever complained to my dad about work since!

So, I have to admit, I do feel very much for James and John in the story we read from Mark's gospel today. I think they've been given a bad rap. I mean, other gospels record Jesus as saying, "Ask and it shall be given unto you." So here they go. They are asking, but now, 2,000 years later are remembered as being selfish. Maybe that's unfair.

Their request, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory," doesn't seem unreasonable, either. They expected Jesus to establish God's Kingdom in Jerusalem, overthrow Roman rule, and renew the Temple. They were loyal to Jesus,

expecting some reward in the coming glory. Should we demonize them as arrogant? Or should we identify with their humanity? They want status. They want to be recognized as important. And who among us could say any differently?

It's easy to think, "How could they not get it?" But their misunderstanding reflects a deeper truth about human nature. Like James and John, we too are shaped by a world that values status, success, and power. We too often chase after things that seem important but miss what's essential. We forget that following Jesus is about more than outward success – it's about embodying a different kind of glory.

Jesus' response offers them – and us – a new vision of what that glory might be. "You do not know what you are asking," he says. "Can you drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Jesus knows that the path he is on leads not to glory in the way they imagine, but to the cross.

Jesus doesn't shame his friends for their desire for importance; instead, he redirects their ambitions toward a different kind of glory. Greatness, according to Jesus, isn't found in being served but in serving others. It's not about holding onto power but about giving it away.

And the way Jesus models this is remarkable. He doesn't start by saying, "Here's how the world works, here's the right strategy. I have all the answers, let me tell you where it's all at." Instead, he asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus begins with empathy, with the posture of a servant. Even as he prepares to go to the cross, he asks how he can serve.

Today, Jesus invites his friends – James and John, and every one of us – into a different kind of glory, a deeper understanding of what it means to be his disciples. At the core of this bold discipleship is the spiritual practice of generosity. And when we talk about generosity, we're not just talking about financial giving, although that's certainly part of it. Generosity, as Jesus shows us, is a way of life, a posture of open-heartedness toward others.

When Jesus calls us to serve rather than seek status, he calls us to a life of generosity. This generosity is more than just a good thing to do; it's a spiritual practice that emboldens our discipleship. Like prayer or worship, it shapes us, converts us, and draws us closer to God. When we give, God changes lives – including our own.

Generosity is like a muscle – the more we use it, the stronger it becomes. But, like any discipline, it takes persistence and commitment. It means choosing to give when it's easier to hold on, living with open hands, and trusting God to provide, even when we feel we lack.

Generosity is countercultural. It challenges the urge to hold on tightly to what we have and instead invites us to live in the freedom of trusting God's abundance, knowing that

God has already given us everything we need to bless others and participate in God's work in the world.

Generosity reminds us who we are in Christ. In a world focused on accumulating and conserving wealth, it helps us remember that our individual identity is not in what we own or the amount of money in our bank account, but in our relationship with God and others. When we give – whether time, resources, money or compassion – we align with Christ, who gave everything for us. We reflect God's image and live out Jesus' call to serve, love, and give for the sake of others.

As a church, we are called to be a community that lives generously – not just in our individual lives but in how we live and work together. When we practice generosity as a community of faith, we move away from a scarcity mindset and toward a sense of sufficiency. We stop focusing on what we don't have and start asking how we can use the gifts God has given us to bless others. This shift is transformative. It changes how we make decisions, how we serve and love our neighbours, and how we relate to each other and the world. It helps us see that we are not simply stewards of our resources; we are stewards of God's grace, called to reflect God's generosity in every part of our lives.

What does it look like when St. Andrew's United Church gives over to this different kind of glory, living out the spiritual practice of generosity? What does it look like when we give, not because we *have* to, but because we *want* to participate in the life of Christ, to bless others as they have been blessed. What decisions do you make together, not out of fear of what might be lost, but out of hope for what can be shared?

St. Andrew's has long demonstrated a profound commitment to generosity, particularly through outreach efforts, including support of Mission and Service of The United Church of Canada, making a difference here in Sudbury, across Canada, and around the world. As you continue to adapt to the changes that come with becoming a smaller, family-sized church, there is such deep gratitude for what has been accomplished in the past. Bold discipleship for you also includes the decisions you make together to carry that legacy forward. Fellowship, care, and compassion for one another – your generosity is lived out in relationship and in prayer.

You also extend care outward through the Community Kitchen, which not only teaches cooking skills but fosters a sense of belonging, an essential part of St. Andrew's bold discipleship. Projects like the collection of socks and coats for those in need, and the continued supply of vitamins to the mission, even today's bake sale hosted by the Church at the Margins group, all reflect your dedication to making a difference. Your financial gifts are important ways to foster stability and continued impact in downtown Sudbury, making a difference in your lives and in the lives of your neighbours. Through these acts of collective generosity, you live out our calling, embodying bold discipleship. Today, we are invited to respond to Jesus calling us to a different kind of glory. We are invited to surrender privilege for service, to trade worldly status for bold discipleship in Christ. What are the risks we are called to take? Where is Jesus calling us to step out in

faith, even when it's uncomfortable? How can we live more courageously as followers of the One who came not to be served but to serve?

When asked if they could drink from Jesus' cup and be baptized with his baptism, James and John answered, "We can." Today may we respond to Jesus, saying "Yes, Lord, we will." Amen.

Loving Christ, we thank you for the gift of your gospel and the challenge it brings to our lives. As we have heard your call to a different kind of glory, one rooted in service and generosity, strengthen us to walk the path of discipleship with boldness and grace. May the seeds of your truth take root in our hearts, growing into acts of compassion, justice, and love for all. Let our lives reflect your goodness, and may we always trust in your abundant grace as we follow Your way. Amen.