

“No Dry Clean Christians”

Mark 10:35-45

Scott B. Martin – 10/18/2009

I was on a mission trip to Honduras, led by Gus and Sue Kuether, who were former missionaries there. Our van pulled off the road beside a mountain stream, known locally as “The Baths of the Three Presidents.” It was called that because it was said that three of Honduras’ presidents swam in this mountain stream. The legend was that if you swam in the waters of that stream you too would become president of Honduras!

It was a beautiful mountain stream, with several cascades that dropped like a step ladder and formed pools at the bottom of each rung. Schlitterbahn could not create a more perfect swimming spot.

The local children knew this swimming spot well. At least a dozen children of all ages were splashing and swimming about. The more courageous ones were sliding down the natural rock chutes from level to level.

We came prepared. Gus and Sue had told us to bring our swimming suits. Soon we joined the fun. The water was ice cold, even though it was summer. Having grown up in Florida and being use to the Gulf of Mexico, with its 85 degree water it was way too cold for me. I settled for wading in up to my hips and lounging around on the rocks. Since I only got half wet I guess I’ll never be president of Honduras, although since I got half wet maybe I can hope to be vice president. After all according to the legend you have to get wet from top to bottom. No halfway measures will work. You have to get wet, really wet!

Downstream from the swimming area the stream leveled out a bit. The water flowed between boulders of various sizes. Here the women of the area gathered to wash their clothes. One by one they would dip them in the water, apply the soap and beat them on a rock, wring them out, repeat the process several times and then spread the clothes on large rocks or on nearby bushes to dry. It could have been a scene straight out of Bible times. Tens of millions of poor people repeat this process around the world every day today. They have no washing machines at home. There are no Laundromats and if there were they would have no money to use them. They certainly wouldn't be able to use dry cleaners. No, for these women in Honduras the same water that bathed once and future presidents would be the same water that washed their clothes and the clothes of most of their neighbors in that poor area.

James and John comes to Jesus with a very strange request, **“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”** (Mk. 10:35b) Unlike Solomon they do not ask for wisdom that they might rule justly. They do not ask for power to accomplish great good. Nor do they ask for forgiveness and grace that they might make a fresh start in following Jesus. Instead, they ask, **“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”** (Mk. 10:37)

What becomes abundantly clear in the following verses is that Jesus' idea of glory and their idea of glory is radically different. They envision a great kingdom that is powerful and wealthy, with Jesus as king and themselves as Jesus most trusted lieutenants. Jesus asks if they can drink of the same cup he is about to drink of and be baptized in the way he is about to be baptized.

Jesus is talking about his coming suffering and death. James and John do not catch on and glibly answer “We are able.” They are ready for the power and the glory but they are not ready for self-sacrifice and Jesus as much as tells them this. Jesus then goes on to say that that they “**will**” later drink “**the cup that I drink**” and “**and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;...**” The hearers of Mark’s Gospel could not help but think about their own baptisms and about drinking the cup during the Lord’s Supper. Mark clearly wants his hearers to connect communion and baptism with Jesus self-sacrificial love and more importantly how Jesus calls us all who would follow him to drink the same cup and be baptized in his baptism.

The tenth chapter of Mark is a remarkable chapter. It calls on Christians to go above and beyond the Law of Moses when it comes to commitments like marriage. It makes children living parables for how to enter the kingdom of heaven. It deals with the question of wealth and the poor and how it is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of heaven. In it Jesus, for the third time, foretells his coming suffering and death on a cross. Finally it ends with the healing of a blind man, who then sets out to follow Jesus. “**Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.**” Baptism into the Body of Christ and sharing the cup with brothers and sisters in Christ is how we are meant to be prepared and taught to drink the cup that Jesus drank and be baptized with the baptism Jesus experienced. In this way become not presidents of Honduras, or even the United States, we become Christ’s companions on the journey of faith.

In Jesus day he welcomed little children, when others would ignore them or shoo them away. Jesus healed the sick and ate with sinners. Jesus upheld the downtrodden and encouraged people of wealth and position to do likewise. The message of servant leadership is found in all four of the Gospels, in three of the four more than once. Clearly this was a major theme for Jesus and the early Christian community.

Jesus was right about something else he said as well, “The poor will be with you always.” They are with us today. The work Jesus began is still necessary today and Jesus is looking for followers to answer the call. On this Children’s Sabbath we are especially mindful the one in six children in this country live in poverty. One out of nine children have no health care. One in three African American boys faces the prospect of being in prison. All of this is taking place in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We have the means to do better, all that is lacking is the will and the effort.

Some think progress is automatic, that progress is inevitable. Is it? Dr. Martin Luther King. Jr. said, **“Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable...Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”** Looking at history it seems to me that King was right.

It is the testimony of the saints that those who practice servant leadership will find “forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, God’s presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in God’s realm which has not end.” Let the saints say, **“Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto God. Amen.”**