



Sermon on 20th Sunday after Trinity 2021 | CWL Sunny Schwarz

*Lord God, mighty king,
you love justice and establish equity;
may we love justice more than gain
and mercy more than power;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen

Imagine a world without evil rulers, without hierarchy and abuse of power....

Charlie Chaplin once said: ***“You only need power when you're up to something bad. For everything else, love is enough.”***

Our experience, history and the news today paint a different picture.

A state wants to be governed, a city administered, a parish run.

It takes men and women to do that. They are responsible.

In a democracy, politicians can be voted out.

This limits their power.

But that is by no means a matter of fact everywhere.

So the daily news keep showing us conditions like in the time of Jesus as we have just heard in the Gospel:

„You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.”

This is reality today as it was 2000 years ago.

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Let's take a closer look at the Gospel story:

The disciples have been traveling with Jesus for quite a while.

They have heard a lot about the kingdom of God and they are well aware of the mission they are on. They are determined.

All of them gave up everything they had and cherished to follow this man from Nazareth: their families, their jobs, their homes.

And now, while they are on their way to Jerusalem together, Jesus repeatedly indicates that this could mean the end for him and also for his earthly mission.

In other words: He tells his followers that he will die in due course.

The disciples are afraid, they are afraid for him - and for themselves.

What would that mean for them?

We get to know James and John, the brothers from Zabadee.

Jesus didn't choose them as his disciples by chance, well, he chose all of the 12 perfectly aware of their strengths and their weaknesses, and he needs them for his salvation plan.

But these two are strong personalities:

Yes, they say - they can drink the cup of suffering that Jesus will drink.

Yes, they say - they are able to endure the baptism into death that Jesus will endure. They are ready to die for Jesus' cause.

And – just a bit of Bible Trivia here – James did die a martyr, he was killed by Herod.

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His brother John died naturally, but only after he was freed from banishment to the island of Patmos.

In the Bible these brothers are nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" and we see that they are emotional, a little quick-tempered and very straight-forward - but so very committed.

Jesus is very fond of them; he even takes them with him to the mount of transfiguration. Maybe that got to their heads.

One might wonder why they suddenly want to be preferred; why they feel the need to secure their places.

By asking to sit 'one at the right hand and one at the left of Jesus in glory'

They think of themselves, selfishly, of their advantage only.

They should know better than that; They should know that their request is presumptuous.

It lets us look into their spiritual abyss: John and James want power.

Not in a bad way, not as in abusive power... They simply long for recognition.

A bit of Fame.

They want to read their names in the history books.

They want to mean something in this world and in the world to come. For this they violate the code of conduct among the disciples and betray their brothers.

And these get very angry when they hear about it, very understandably so.

We experience the very same in our lives – this “me first mentality”, people asking for more than what’s morally acceptable - in the small and in the bigger



things – and daily we face impudence, presumptuousness, Power plays of all sorts... because people want to secure their places.

Only Jesus sees what remains hidden from the disciples and what we would most probably tend to ignore:

He looks right into James' and John's heart and into their abyss:

There is their love for him, but there is also their love for one another, a love that's vulnerable and zealous, a love that wants to possess and to be exclusive. A very human, fragile love.

And then, there is fear of dying. Jesus' death is on their minds. And they do ponder what that means for each one of them... Yes, they would die for Jesus. But to die and then – not being remembered, as if they had never existed? The fear creeps in.... the fear of being an invisible, replaceable, forgotten background actor.

Jesus sees this - and understands.

Only he can react so incredibly mildly to the immoral concerns of the two brothers. Mild and yet clear. *"It is not my place to assign you places in heaven,"* he says at last, almost as if he felt sorry for them.

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them."

he later explains to the disciples.

And then he offers them something else: something like a liberating, life-saving offer.



“But it is not so among you;” he says and means they should treat each other differently.

“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”

Do as I do, he says. I serve and I give my life as a ransom for many.

John and James – easy to condemn with the knowledge we have today – the Good news of the Gospel readily available and knowing what these dear brothers couldn't even imagine in their wildest dreams.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to listen in on the brothers' conversation after Jesus reprimanded them... being a witness to them promising to being an even better disciple from now on... they understood Jesus' message and most probably were ashamed of their request for power – and were determined to be humble and servant to all from now on.

In our daily lives, we all are surrounded by power, our world is built on power, people are used to dominion, hierarchies, rules and pecking orders... not many I am sure would even consider giving their life for others. These disciples, such individual characters, should be our role models.

Can we live together in this world by exercising less power, with fewer rules, but more common sense, charity and service?

Well - thanks to Jesus Christ, the Christian community has another way of looking at togetherness.

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Christians are to serve the world with acts of love.

Remember what Charlie Chaplin said:

“You only need power when you're up to something bad.

For everything else, love is enough.”

Love is our God-given power!

The more we use it, the more he will provide for us.

And the Lord wants us to take our love and with it,
enlighten even the darkest places...

By serving each other, humble, with love, respect and care,
we are indeed powerful in His name, in the best possible way;
and we remain what Jesus promised us we would be:

The salt of the earth. The light of the world.

Let us be the light.

Share his love.

and serve in His name.

And by doing that – let us all glorify our Father in heaven.

AMEN.