



So shall it not be among you: the nature of true greatness and real power

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“...The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live...” (Ecclesiastes 9:3)

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before the high God?
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;
and what doth the LORD require of thee,
but to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6.^{6,8})*

Part 1¹—apostolic confession and rebuke

Matthew 16.¹³⁻²³

¹³When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”

¹⁴And they said, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵He saith unto them, “But whom say ye that I am?”

¹⁶And Simon Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷And Jesus answered and said unto him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. ¹⁸And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

²⁰Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

²¹From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. ²²Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”

²³But he turned, and said unto Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

Introduction to the series

Mine is not, of course, the only way to structure or understand the synoptic Gospels. But it is one way. And it is a way that speaks to me. Perhaps it will speak to you as well.

¹In this series of homilies, we will explore the topic of “The Nature of True Greatness and Real Power” through the following texts: Matthew 16.¹³⁻²³; Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶; Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}; Mark 9.³³⁻³⁷ & Matthew 18.²⁻⁴; Luke 9.⁵¹⁻⁵⁶; Mark 10.³⁵⁻⁴⁵; Matthew 21.¹⁻⁵; and Philippians 2.¹⁻¹¹; Revelation 5.¹⁻⁷

As I understand the movement of the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—approximately the first half of their narratives regularly report on miracles that Jesus performed in a very public demonstration of his greatness and power. Between the three synoptic Gospels, nearly 75% of the miracles traditionally identified as having been performed by Jesus (and over 80% in the case of Matthew and Mark) were reported in the first half of the Gospels.^a

For example, in his book of roughly 24,000 words (in the KJV), Matthew records twenty-three traditionally identified miracles performed by Jesus. By the 12,000-word mark, Matthew has already recorded nineteen of them, leaving but four for the final 12,000 words. It is around the 12,000-word mark that Matthew arrives at Peter’s confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” with Jesus’ accompanying warning of his impending rejection and death, Peter’s rebuke of Jesus, and Jesus’ necessary rebuke of Peter as the latter demonstrates his misunderstanding concerning the true meaning and nature of Messianic greatness and power reflected in Jesus’ miracles.

These observations are more than a trifling bit of math wizardry. Peter’s confession represents a turning point in the Gospels, and, perhaps, in Jesus’ ministry. With this confession and rebuke comes a shift in emphasis and purpose. The second half of the synoptic Gospels’ arc contains far, far fewer reports of miracles. Replacing these reports of miracles are reports of Jesus’ attempts to help his disciples understand the true nature of the greatness and power that they accurately witness in his miracles. In addition, it is in association with Peter’s confession that Jesus speaks for the first time directly and openly of his looming rejection and death. He will, the text informs us, “from that time forth” issue predictions and warnings concerning his ultimate rejection and death.

Perhaps this Gospel structure represented a reality and necessity of Jesus’ actual earthly ministry. Perhaps the Gospel writers (or me) imposed the structure upon Jesus’ earthly ministry in order to teach a principle that they had gleaned from Jesus’ earthly ministry. Either way, there is much to learn from this structure.

Here is one of the principles we can glean from the structure. It is the principle upon which this series of homilies focuses. It is a principle, I believe, that Jesus himself held and lived by. It is a principle, I believe, that he attempted to pass on to his disciples.

True greatness and power; the kind of greatness and power that God exercises is something completely different than what the world imagines it to be. God possesses and exercises greatness and power very differently and out of very different motives than human beings themselves possess and wield greatness and power, such as it is. Further, God possesses and exercises greatness and power very differently and out of very different motives than human beings imagine and expect that *He* does. Finally, human beings must resist and reject the world's false ideas of the nature of greatness and power and adopt those of God. Only by so doing can human beings possess even the slightest glimmer of hope for peace in this world and an abiding existence in the world to come. To exercise greatness and power in a manner contrary to God's manner is to invite chaos and sure annihilation and extinction.

In this series of homilies we make the same points over and over again. We do so in a variety of ways. Hopefully, the repetition does grow weary. But, the fact is, the world as it is today is proof positive that it has not heard or heeded our Lord's warning voice. The world continues to suffer under notions of greatness and power that can only be described as anti-Christ. So, apparently, one can't speak the words of God too often. One can't speak too often of the nature of true greatness and real power as it exists in God and as it must exist in mortals. And, of course, the word of God never, ever grows mundane, but remains always vibrant and lively and quick and powerful and discerning.

Finally, a reminder. What we are doing here is homily, not commentary. We cannot, then, leave it at explication and discovery. We must move to application. We hope that this series encourages the reader to examine their own attitudes toward greatness and their own use of power, such as it is. In addition, we hope that the reader examines the world around them; examines those who are thought great and who exercise power in their community, in their church, in their state, in their nation—in their life—and hold them up against Jesus' standard. Do they, imperfect as they are, strive to exercise power as Jesus exercised it and as Jesus taught his disciples to exercise it? If so, then praise God. If not, then they must be challenged

to do and be better. If they refuse to repent, they must be rejected and we more skilled in choosing to whom we grant power.

Very practical and applicable, this series of homilies.

Introduction to today's homily

“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This was Peter’s true and inspired answer to the Savior’s question, “Whom say ye that I am?” In so confessing, Peter gave voice to each of the disciples’ beliefs and hopes. We need not use our imagination to understand what this meant to Peter and the other disciples. We know very well the Messianic tradition that they inherited and held amongst themselves.

Victorious and successful in all that he set his mind to, among Messiah’s endless powers was his power to defeat by any and every means every power—political and religious, temporal or eternal—that resisted him and threatened his people. Given Judah’s subjugation to the Romans, only the last in a series of national humiliations and subjugations, such a belief was like water to a man dying of thirst in the hottest and driest of deserts. We catch a glimpse of this thirst in Zachariah’s blessing of his son, John.

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel;
for he hath visited and redeemed his people,
and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David;
as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets,
which have been since the world began:
that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all that hate us;
to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant;
the oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

that he would grant unto us,
that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him,
all the days of our life.”²

The disciples had, at the point of Peter’s confession, spent some two action-packed years with Jesus. They had watched him do the most amazing things. They were sure of his capacities. This man—who seemed more than man as he commanded even the elements, bringing peace to a raging sea and multiplying food sufficient for but a few into a feast for many—could do anything. Nothing could stand in his way. Failure of any kind was unthinkable. God was with him in an unprecedented and unexplainable manner. Jesus was, they had concluded for themselves, the powerful and always victorious Messiah. On this day of glorious confession, how promising the prospects must have looked to Peter as he uttered his confession and as he and his companions considered the future.

If there is any doubt as to Peter’s feelings and his expectations of Messiah, it is removed upon Peter’s response to Jesus’ well-timed, purposeful, and unwelcome warning that Jesus’ future held unexpected tragedy in what would look like failure and defeat in light of the disciples’ grandiose expectations. Here is Jesus’ warning, his first direct warning of his impending rejection and death ministry.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

And here is Peter’s response.

“Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.’”³

² Luke 1.⁶⁸⁻⁷⁵

³ Matthew 16.²²

Failure and defeat, or even the appearance of such were not an option. This apostolic rebuke of the Church's actual leader from the Church's future visible leader was as much a "confession" as was that uttered just moments earlier: "Thou art the Christ. These two, confession and rebuke go hand in hand. One should not read the former without the latter. The latter informs the reader what the former meant in the minds of Jesus' blind disciples. It also tells us how very, very far apart in principle and character were Jesus and his disciples; how very, very far apart was Jesus and this world when it came to understanding and exercising true greatness and power.

From that time forth

We know what produced the apostolic confession: a question. But we must have a closer look at what brought the apostolic rebuke, for it represents Jesus' own and far worthier confession about the nature of his Messiahship and the true nature of greatness and power.

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."⁴

One can hardly imagine a bigger bubble buster. One can certainly feel for Peter. "You confess that I am the Messiah, and so I am. But, contrary to your expectations, I am a rejected Messiah who will die at the hands of far inferior and wicked men." At the same time, his potentially comforting final words, "I will be raised the third day," were incomprehensible to his disciples. Unappreciated, these concluding and promising words did not bring either the needed correction to a false expectation or the intended comfort.

We note Matthew's, "from that time forth." It seems, and is confirmed in the texts that report Jesus' actions and words previous to this moment, that Jesus had not previously directly confronted his disciples with any such dilemma and contradiction concerning his ultimate

⁴ Matthew 16.²¹. Mark and Luke also report Jesus' response to Peter's confession, a response that drew the vociferous reply from Peter. See Mark 8.³¹⁻³² and Luke 9.²¹⁻²².

fate. Additionally, “from that time forth,” Jesus offered continuous corrective instruction concerning the nature of true greatness and real power. He did this by means of his teaching, his actions, and his correction to false attitudes and behaviors on the part of his disciples. In the upcoming homilies, we will explore these teachings, actions, and corrections that were meant to instruct and change his disciples’ attitudes to both the nature of his own greatness and power and toward the nature of true greatness and real power in general.

For his part, Mark noted that Jesus “spake that saying *openly*.” The Greek word translated, “openly” (*parrhēsia*) means to speak with candor or frankness. Negatively, it can also indicate “‘impudence’ or ‘insolence’ or ‘shamelessness.’”⁵ Mark, then, would have us understand that Jesus’ response to Peter’s confession was more than an objective statement of fact. It also served to challenge, without compromise, a misperception that Jesus discerned in Peter’s confession. With Peter’s rebuke of Jesus, Jesus was under the necessity of being more blunt and even more strident and uncompromising, Peter’s feelings be damned.

“Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

As it turns out, Jesus could read Peter’s thoughts and motives. He understood that Peter’s confession, “thou art the Christ,” was spoken as much in the interest of himself, Peter, and winning the acceptance of others as it was in speaking “truth.” We witness this same self-concern over and over in not only Peter, but in all the apostles. In addition, Peter’s confession left room for the satanic impulse—an impulse older than this planet’s existence and rebelliously exercised during a war in heaven—to misuse greatness and power for personal ends. In the end, Jesus had no choice but to point out Peter’s satanic offensiveness “openly.”

Through pure testimony and a stern rebuke, Jesus uttered a far truer confession of his Messiahship than that of Peter. Then, Jesus immediately returned his attention to the patient instruction of his blind disciples. We will examine this instruction concerning the nature of true greatness and power in our next homily.

⁵ See *TDNT*.

Jesus never hid the reality of his greatness and power. He never denied his power to any who came to him in need, desperation even, and trust. But Jesus' greatness and power had nothing to do with that of the false traditions of greatness and power that his disciples envisioned when they contemplated him or his Messiahship. It had nothing to do with worldly estimations of greatness and power. Rather, Jesus' greatness and the clearest evidence and exercise of his power would be found in his suffering and death for others. Jesus would most clearly reveal his greatness, and most appropriately exercise his power, not from a throne, but from a cross.

Jesus' divine assertion was more than unfathomable to Peter and his fellow disciples. It was downright offensive, worthy of an apostolic rebuke as passionate as the earlier apostolic confession. Jesus met this unworthy apostolic rebuke and passion with his own passionate rebuke. Peter's ideas of Jesus' Messiahship, based upon false traditions concerning the nature of true greatness and real power, were contrary to the mind and will of God and stood in opposition to all that God stood for. It was therefore necessary, however unwelcome, to call these false traditions and practices by their proper name: satanic.

Sadly, the passion and beliefs behind Peter's apostolic rebuke of Jesus and his alarming claim about the nature of greatness and power are alive and well today. Notwithstanding Jesus' clear teachings, satanic attitudes toward greatness and the nature of power continue to dominate this sorry excuse of a planet to this very day—including, tragically and shamefully, among that portion of the planet's inhabitants that calls itself 'Christian.'

It is devastating when individuals hold and act upon satanic attitudes about the nature of greatness and power in their private life. People suffer, sometimes terribly, at their hands. However, when individuals act publicly to form communities, political parties, and nations based upon these same satanic attitudes and actions, they threaten more than a few individuals. They threaten the very existence of society; indeed, of civilization itself. They threaten annihilation. We are, today, on the brink of annihilation. All because individuals and institutions reject, as Peter once did, the Messiah's unwelcome truth that true greatness and

real power are found, not in Lordship, but in the selfless self-sacrifice for others.

So, how are you doing in your exercise of power, such as it is? How are others whom you think great and who wield power doing? Are they following, or striving to follow as best they can the divine example of true greatness and real power that Jesus so perfectly exemplified? If they are not, are you bold enough and faithful enough to admonish them? Are you bold enough and faithful enough to turn away from them if they refuse correction and repentance? Are you enough of a disciple of Jesus to do that? The world is counting on just such bold and faithful discipleship. It is counting on you.

*“Wait on the Lord, and keep his way,
and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land:
when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.
I have seen the wicked in great power,
and spreading himself like a green bay tree.
Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not:
yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.”⁶*

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

⁶ Psalm 27.³⁴⁻³⁶

^a Following is a breakdown of Jesus' traditional miracles along with their distribution throughout the Gospels. Because John seems to possess an agenda even more radically different than even the very different agendas of the three synoptic Gospels, I have and will focus only on those three synoptic Gospels in my analysis.

Miracle	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Water turned to wine				2. ¹⁻¹¹
Nobleman's son healed				4. ⁴⁶⁻⁵⁴
Draught of fish			5. ⁴⁻¹¹	
Man with unclean spirit healed		1. ²¹⁻²⁷	4. ³¹⁻³⁶	
Peter's mother-in-law healed	8. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵	1. ³⁰⁻³¹	4. ³⁸⁻³⁹	
A multitude of sick healed	8. ¹⁶	1. ³²⁻³⁴	4. ⁴⁰⁻⁴¹	
Leper healed	8. ²⁻⁴	1. ⁴⁰⁻⁴²	5. ¹²⁻¹³	
Palsied man healed	9. ²⁻⁷	2. ³⁻¹²	5. ¹⁸⁻²⁵	
Crippled man healed at Bethesda				5. ¹⁻⁹
Man with withered hand healed	12. ¹⁰⁻¹³	3. ¹⁻⁵	6. ⁶⁻¹⁰	
Centurion's son healed	8. ⁵⁻¹³		7. ¹⁻¹⁰	
Nain widow's son raised from dead			7. ¹¹⁻¹⁵	
Calming the storm at sea	8. ²³⁻²⁷	4. ³⁷⁻⁴¹	8. ²²⁻²⁵	
Man with legions healed	8. ²⁸⁻³⁴	5. ¹⁻¹⁵	8. ²⁷⁻³⁹	
Woman with issue of blood healed	9. ²⁰⁻²²	5. ²⁵⁻²⁹	8. ⁴³⁻⁴⁸	
Jarius' daughter raised from dead	9. ^{18-19, 23-25}	5. ^{22-24, 38-42}	8. ^{41-42, 49-56}	
Two blind men healed	9. ²⁷⁻³¹			
A possessed mute man healed	9. ³²⁻³³			
Man with "devil," blind & dumb healed	12. ²²		11. ¹⁴	
Feeding of 5,000	14. ¹⁵⁻²¹	6. ³⁵⁻⁴⁴	9. ¹²⁻¹⁷	6. ⁶⁻¹³
Jesus walks on water	14. ²⁵	6. ⁴⁸⁻⁵¹		6. ¹⁹⁻²⁰
Multitudes healed in Gennesaret	14. ³⁴⁻³⁶	6. ⁵³⁻⁵⁶		
Syrophenician woman's daughter healed	15. ²¹⁻²⁸	7. ²⁴⁻³⁰		
Many, including deaf & dumb healed	15. ²⁹⁻³¹	7. ³¹⁻³⁷		
Feeding of 4,000	15. ³²⁻³⁸	8. ¹⁻⁹		
Blind healed at Bethsaida		8. ²²⁻²⁶		
Peter's confession	16.¹³⁻²⁰	8.²⁷⁻³⁰	9.¹⁸⁻²¹	
Demonic son healed	17. ¹⁴⁻¹⁸	9. ¹⁷⁻²⁹	9. ³⁸⁻⁴³	
Coin taken from fish	17. ²⁴⁻²⁷			
Man born blind healed			11. ¹⁴	9. ¹⁻⁷
Crippled woman healed			13. ¹⁰⁻¹⁷	
Man with dropsy healed			14. ¹⁻⁴	
Lazarus raised from dead				11. ¹⁻⁴⁴

Ten lepers healed			17. ¹¹⁻¹⁹	
Two blind (Bartimaeus) healed	20. ²⁹⁻³⁴	10. ⁴⁶⁻⁵²	18. ³⁵⁻⁴³	
Fig tree cursed and withered	21. ¹⁸⁻²²	11. ^{12-14, 20-25}		
Soldier's severed ear healed			22. ⁵⁰⁻⁵¹	
	19/4 (23/83% before)	17/3 (20/85% before)	15/7 (22/68% before)	5/2 (7/71% before)
Synoptic 23/9 (31 total /74% before)				

Part 2—take up his cross

Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶

²⁴Then said Jesus unto his disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Introduction to today’s homily

Jesus offered demonstration after demonstration of his greatness and power. He did so through word and deed. In response to those demonstrations of greatness and power, and to Jesus’ query, “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter offered his great apostolic confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹

Sensing, I believe, in Peter’s confession a misunderstanding concerning Jesus’ Messiahship and the nature of his greatness and power, Jesus, as corrective to that misunderstanding, “from that time forth began... to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed...”²

Jesus *was* great and powerful. But his greatness and power was to be observed from a different set of proofs than the world had taught the disciples to expect. Jesus’ intuition about his disciples’ misunderstanding was soon confirmed. Shocked by Jesus’ unwelcome pronouncement of rejection, suffering, and death—a pronouncement that ran directly contrary to the apostles’ expectations of any future with Jesus—Peter took Jesus to task and

¹ Matthew 16.¹⁵⁻¹⁶

² Matthew 16.²¹

“began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.’”³

Witnessing Peter’s resistance to his pronouncement—a pronouncement that was at the very heart of Jesus’ *raison d’être*—and perceiving all too well the inspiration for that resistance, Jesus offered his own rebuke in response to Peter’s presumptuous apostolic rebuke.

“Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”⁴

We might be surprised to find that the confession that “Jesus is the Christ”—a confession that Paul declared and modern “Christians” are fond of announcing “is made unto salvation”⁵—can have an ugly side. This confession, at first blush “blessed,” can, as did Peter’s, turn into ugly egotism. Worse, it can turn satanic. Under such circumstances, the confession warrants, not blessing, but rebuke. Thus, Jesus was under necessity of constantly fighting off this satanic intrusion into the true kingdom of God—an intrusion that inspired a false view of the nature of greatness and power and justified a satanic expression and exercise of greatness and power. Jesus began this battle immediately upon Peter’s confession.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”⁶

In Jesus’ instruction that is found in today’s text, we witness Jesus’ continuing resistance to the egotistical and Satanic intrusion into the kingdom of God, with that intrusion’s false notions concerning the nature of true greatness and real power. Not only is Jesus’ greatness and power different than what the world, including his closest disciples, imagines it to be, but true greatness and real power also looks different as practiced in the life of those who would presume to be his disciples. The first pill is hard enough to swallow, as Peter demonstrates.

³ Matthew 16.²²

⁴ Matthew 16.²³

⁵ See Romans 10.⁹⁻¹⁰

⁶ Matthew 16.²¹. Mark and Luke also report Jesus’ response to Peter’s confession, a response that drew the vociferous reply from Peter. See Mark 8.³¹⁻³² and Luke 9.²¹⁻²².

The second is even more difficult still.

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

Since this is the first of Jesus’ many attempts to clarify the nature of true greatness and real power as practiced by Jesus and disciples, we will take it slow and chop the pill into small little pieces.

İf any man will come after me

When we read Jesus’ “if any man will...,” we might think, first, in terms of tense, as if Jesus is speaking of something that looms in the future. But this “will” is not about the chronological unfolding of events. This “will” is as much home in the present as in the future. Jesus’ “will,” is about volition. Jesus is speaking here of human desire: “if any man *wants* to come after me...,” or, “if anyone *desires* to follow me...,” or, “if anyone *intends* to follow me.”

So, right off the bat, Jesus goes rummaging around inside, demanding that his listeners and those who would later hear word of him consider inner desires, wishes, and wants. “What are your wishes? More specifically, what are your wishes visa-via me, Jesus? You have a choice. You can follow me or not. If you do not wish to follow me, then you can go do as you please. Live it up. But, ‘if anyone wishes to follow me,’” says Jesus, “then you’re committed. So, choose carefully.”

“Well,” we might wonder, “to what, exactly, are we committing when we choose to follow you, Jesus?”

Jesus does not long keep us waiting for an answer. And his answer is short and sweet.

Let him deny himself

“If anyone wishes to follow me,” Jesus says, they must “deny” themselves. The King James’ “let,” could sound as if we are let just a tad off the hook. We still might have a choice. Maybe we can “follow Jesus” but not “deny” ourselves. But the verb, “deny,” is in the imperative: “deny yourself!” Our first choice to follow Jesus removes the second choice whether to deny or not to deny ourselves. Jesus is not mincing words here. Peter’s confession/rebuke has made it clear to Jesus that mincing words will not get him or the community he envisions where they need and must be if individuals and societies are to be saved, improved, and exalted.

And what of this “deny”? What do we make of it? Can we just deny ourselves the occasional candy bar, Bud Light, sexual dalliance? Can we simply pinch a few pennies Jesus’ way? If only. The Greek word, *aparnéomai*, means “to reject, disown, or renounce claim to.” It can mean “to be faithless [to oneself].” The disciples must practice a form of self-denial in which they become unfaithful to all the false traditions with which this world had so thoroughly indoctrinated them. This unfaithfulness to long-held traditions will look to others and will even often feel like faithlessness to self. Disciples of Jesus can no longer lay claim to themselves or to their “wishes.” They do not belong to themselves. They belong to Jesus. And they belong to everyone else.

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”⁷

Having second thoughts, yet, about what you wish for? What you want? About committing yourself to following Jesus? Well, it is about to get worse. Jesus’ demand for self-denial is about to become clearer and yet more challenging.

Take up his cross, and follow me

“Imitation,” Oscar Wilde suggested, “is the sincerest form of flattery.” Jesus does not care to

⁷ Philippians 2.⁴

be flattered, but he is serious about his desire to be imitated. Imitating him is absolutely essential. He has already warned of his coming rejection, suffering, and death. He will now give a clue to both the character of his own self-denial and that which will be expected of those who follow him: “take up your cross in imitation of me.”

One can be sure that it wasn't until after Jesus had taken up his own cross at Calvary that his disciples began to fully appreciate the significance and depth of Jesus' admonition that a follower “take up his cross.” Nevertheless, one can be sure that they knew full well, even at that earlier time, about crucifixion. They knew all about the cross' tortuous physical pain, the emotional humiliation of suffering the cross—a humiliation experienced by both the crucified and anyone associated with or related to the cross-bearing sufferer—and the haunting death inflicted by the cross.

Jesus' disciples could indeed appreciate, even then, the radical and offensive implications of Jesus' admonition. One must be prepared to suffer humiliation, extreme suffering, and even death in order to be true disciples of Jesus, and to be the kind of blessing to others that children of Abraham were called to be and that followers of Jesus were expected to be in spades.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”⁸

It is little wonder, then, that Jesus would be under the necessity of repeating himself over and over again. “Prepare to die if you wish to live.”

jesus' topsy-turvy loss-is-gain, gain-is-loss world

Of course, with Jesus' crucifixion, the nature of Jesus' own self-denial and the nature of the self-denial expected of disciples would become unmistakable. Equally unmistakable would be the nature of true greatness and real power. Loss as the world understood it, was gain.

⁸ John 12.²⁴

Gain, as the world understood it, was loss.

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

This truly was “denial.” This giving of one’s own life was the ultimate unfaithfulness to self. Yet, it was only such unfaithfulness that could led to a life worth living. This was, indeed, a radical reversal of all that this world stands for.

Jesus came by this topsy-turvy world view honestly. If Peter and his brethren were caught flatfooted by Jesus’ radical understanding of true greatness and real power, then they must have either never met or heard a word of what his Mother, Mary, had to say about him.

It is highly likely that before he heard of it from or witnessed it in the exemplary behavior of his Heavenly Father, Jesus saw and heard of the divine reversal while his mother held and bounced him on her knees. God had turned her world upside down, bringing exaltation where before only the prospects of lowliness could be seen. And, Mary sensed, her son’s life would be devoted to all sorts of unexpected and otherworldly reversals.

Gabriel may have informed Mary of the glorious name she was to give her son. He may have informed her of Jesus’ Divinity. He may have announced Jesus’ kingship. But it was Mary’s own personal encounter with God and her mother’s intuition, that led her to understand just how radically her son, named, ‘God Saves,’ would exercise his godly power. His would be a topsy-turvy kingdom, indeed.

“He hath shewed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;

and the rich he hath sent empty away.”⁹

Jesus was nothing if not one who practiced what he, and, undoubtedly, his mother before him, preached. So, he spoke his unwelcome warning to his disciples: his Messiahship would bring personal rejection and a loss of life to himself. Mighty, he would be put down. His true might and power would be revealed in his death. Exalted, he would be brought low. Brought low, the nature of his exalted status would be manifest. Having lost all, he would gain all. But now, here, Jesus is applying the lessons he had learned from his Father and mother to any and every would-be disciple. If they chose to follow him, he would remake them into his image. They must prepare to lose all if they were to gain and find all that eternity had to offer.

If anyone is beginning to feel that Jesus’ requirements for discipleship are outlandish, impossible even, well... we empathize. Apparently, Jesus wasn’t kidding when he said, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”¹⁰ This gate to life, running through self-denial and unfaithfulness to oneself up to and including willing and humiliating death as it does, is far narrower than we might have imagined. In fact, the baptismal “gate” looks like an open eight-lane freeway compared to this needle sized slit that gives entrance into the kingdom of God.

Conclusion and benediction

Jesus’ many, varied, and constant miracles were a primary demonstration of his greatness and power. In witnessing Jesus’ greatness and power, Jesus’ disciples became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and that, as Messiah, he could not and would not suffer any reversals or failures as the world reckoned them. Thus, when Jesus suggested that reversals in the form of rejection, suffering, and death were eminent, Peter, speaking no doubt for all, felt so confident as to presumptuously rebuke the man that he had just moments earlier named, “Messiah.”

⁹ Luke 1.⁵¹⁻⁵³

¹⁰ Matthew 7.¹⁴

Observing that his disciples were unable or unwilling to grasp the true nature of his Messiahship and his otherworldly greatness and use of power, Jesus shifted gears. His ministry began to focus on clarifying the true nature of his own greatness and power. But his instruction went beyond his personal use of greatness and power. He began to explain and demonstrate that those who would be his disciples would, themselves, be required to follow his example of true greatness and real power. They too would be required to take up their cross and suffer loss in order to bring gain, not only to themselves but to those around them.

All of this is intimidating. One can be excused for feeling dismayed and overwhelmed, as the disciples felt after Jesus' related announcement concerning the near impossibility of a rich man entering the Kingdom of God: "Who, then, can be saved." We can only trust Jesus' assurance:

"With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."¹¹

But, however difficult, those who desire to be disciples of Jesus cannot avoid the standard. It is, in fact, fair and appropriate to examine the world around us and judge those who claim to be Jesus' disciples by this high standard. It is fair to call satanic those who openly oppose this standard, whether in word or deed. It is fair to call satanic any who themselves use, or any who justify others' use of greatness and power for personal ends.

Perhaps, as we realize these truths, we might come to understand and appreciate Peter's rebuke. Perhaps we might humbly confess not only that Jesus is the Christ but that we, like Peter, often stand as rebukers of Jesus as we speak and act contrary to his divine standard of true greatness and the exercise of power.

Today is as good a time as any to acknowledge, accept, and live Jesus' revealed principles of true greatness and real power. It is as good a time as any to kneel in awe and wonder at the foot of Jesus' cross—the seat of real greatness and true power—and commit ourselves to mounting that same cross. Then, and only then will we find ourselves, and gain a life that

¹¹ See Matthew 19.²³⁻²⁶

surpasses in unimaginable ways and to an unimaginable degree the pitiful life that this world lives and offers.

So, again, how are you doing in your exercise of power, such as it is? How are others whom you think great and who wield power doing? Are they following, or striving to follow as best they can the divine example of true greatness and real power that Jesus so perfectly exemplified? If they are not, are you bold enough and faithful enough to admonish them? Are you bold enough and faithful enough to turn away from them if they refuse correction and repentance? Are you enough of a disciple of Jesus to do that? The world is counting on just such bold and faithful discipleship. It is counting on you.

*“O God, thou art my God;
early will I seek thee:
my soul thirsteth for thee,
my flesh longeth for thee
in a dry and thirsty land,
where no water is;
To see thy power and thy glory,
so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.
Because thy lovingkindness is better than life,
my lips shall praise thee.
Thus will I bless thee while I live:
I will lift up my hands in thy name.
My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;
and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:
When I remember thee upon my bed,
and meditate on thee in the night watches.”¹²*

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

¹² Psalm 63.¹⁻⁶

Part 3—let these sayings sink down into your ears

Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}

²⁸*About an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. ²⁹And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. ³⁰And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: ³¹who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.

³³*As they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias:” not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. ³⁵And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, “This is my beloved Son: hear him.” ³⁶And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

⁴⁴“Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.” ⁴⁵But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.

Introduction

Jesus’ disciples were impressed. They had witnessed Jesus exercise incredible power in healing individuals with all manner of physical and emotional afflictions. He had given sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the speechless, and clear skin to the leper. He had controlled and conquered demons, even legions of them, and commanded the forces of nature, calming angry seas and feeding hungry multitudes. He had adroitly fended off the attacks of Judah’s greatest religious minds who were antagonistic toward him. When, at Caesarea Philippi, then, Jesus asked, “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter, answering for all the disciples, triumphantly confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus, they had concluded, was the Messiah.

It is at just this glorious moment that Jesus, sensing that this confession meant something different to his disciples than it did to him, applied his first corrective to their false notions of

him and his Messiahship by offering his first of several dark warnings concerning his future.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”¹

With this unwelcome personal Messianic testimony, Peter’s confession turned astonishingly and quickly satanic as he “rebuked” Jesus. Peter’s confession and rebuke, together, offer the best understanding concerning how the disciples viewed Jesus at this stage of his ministry. Jesus’ rejoinder to Peter’s satanic rebuke offers a clear understanding of Jesus’ own view of himself, his Messiahship, the meaning of discipleship, and the nature of true greatness and power.

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”²

In light of Jesus’ own undeniable power, and in order to correct his disciples’ obstinate false notions concerning him, his Messiahship, and what their own discipleship entailed, Jesus would be under necessity of repeating over and over again his dark warning and his unorthodox view concerning the nature of true greatness and real power. These correctives often came in moments when Jesus’ greatness and power was most evident. On the face of it, Jesus’ dark warnings stood in stark contrast to the glory of the moment. His transfiguration on a mount in Caesarea Philippi was one such moment. In this homily, we turn our attention to this event and its immediate aftermath.

t ransfiguration

The synoptics are agreed that a week passed between Peter’s confession/rebuke and Jesus’

¹ Matthew 16.²¹

² Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁵

transfiguration.³ While praying on an unnamed mount, Jesus' physical appearance and even his clothing were altered, whereupon Moses and Elijah appeared and conversed with him. While all three synoptic Gospels record the event, only Luke records any part of the conversation. We can imagine any number of subjects that these three might have discussed, many of them glorious and heady. But Luke tells us only that they "spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

We should note this important juxtaposition. During what must surely have been one of the most glorious moments in Jesus' entire mortal life, discussion turned to what must surely have been the darkest moment in Jesus' entire mortal life. Yet, this darkest of moments, his final suffering and death, was the greatest demonstration of divine greatness and power and glory exhibited in Jesus' entire mortal life.

But there is something else that only Luke records. During this depressing discussion of Jesus' looming death—a death that was, itself, glorious—"Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep." We can be quite certain that this notice is not intended as commentary on the disciple's sleep deprivation or physical exhaustion. Rather, we should understand that just as Jesus' disciples could not abide, without offering a rebuke, Jesus' first warning concerning his approaching rejection and death, they could not abide the depressing conversation focused on that same rejection and death that took place during Jesus' transfiguration.

At every stage of Jesus' ministry, the message of Jesus' humiliation and the reality of that humiliation was not only beyond the disciples' comprehension, it was beyond their ability or willingness to accept. It is Mark who informs us that even as Jesus began his descent into the pains of hell in Gethsemane, the disciples were found sleeping. Once more, however, they were not sleeping out of a lack of sleep, but "for sorrow."⁴

Avoidance, even through slumber, was preferable to facing the reality of Jesus' humiliation

³ According to Matthew and Mark, six days have passed since Peter's confession/rebuke. According to Luke, eight days.

⁴ Luke 22.⁴⁵

and death. Indeed, the periodically recorded apostolic slumber seems almost a Gospel cypher for the disciples' habitual avoidance and even rejection of Jesus' unwelcome message.

Even in their avoidance of the unwelcome, however, the disciples could appreciate and celebrate the glory of the transfiguring event. Even as Peter offered his recommendation for memorializing the sacred event—"let us make three tabernacles . . . , not knowing what he said"—the celebratory moment was interrupted with a "voice out of the cloud,"

"This is my beloved Son: hear him."

Now, I suppose one could read this as a simple and general admonition. "You are always to pay attention and act upon everything that comes from Jesus' mouth." But one wonders if, perhaps, the admonition wasn't more context driven, and so a little more specific than that. "Listen to what my Son is telling you about himself, about his Messiahship, about his impending rejection and death, about the self-sacrifice that will be expected of you, about the unexpected nature of true greatness and real power."

Another burst bubble

According to Matthew, as the party descended, Jesus charged his disciples, "tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead."⁵ Jesus regularly requested that those to whom he ministered keep their experience with him private. Indeed, just a week earlier and after Peter's confession, Jesus had "charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ."⁶ There might have been many reasons for such requests. But one suspects, and the texts in places seem to confirm, that Jesus' concern centered on the fact that his words, his actions, and his character would be, as they were by his disciples, misunderstood. His Messiahship would be thought of in the old false terms rather than the unorthodox terms in which he viewed himself and the nature of his greatness and power.

⁵ Matthew 17.⁹ Mark adds, here, that the disciples "kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean" (9.¹⁰).

⁶ Matthew 16.²⁰

In addition, Jesus' disciples apparently did not notice that Jesus' use of his power had always served the needs of others rather than his own. Power was not to be used for self-aggrandizement. We should note that when, perhaps, Jesus did exercise his power for his own needs, it was done in as subdued a manner as possible so as not to draw undue attention.

Though the occurrence is not traditionally identified as a "miracle," consider Jesus' apparent exercise of power at Nazareth in the opening days of his ministry. Returning from his 40-day desert trial, Jesus attended synagogue on a sabbath day. During the service, he was invited to read from one of the synagogue's sacred scrolls. Whether at his own choosing or another's, he read from Isaiah, itself a profound bit of reversal.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;
he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,
to preach deliverance to the captives,
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty them that are bruised,
To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”⁷

Upon finishing his reading, he indicated that the ministry upon which he was embarking would be consistent with the spirit of the reading. Questioned about his assertion, Jesus then warned against rejecting him as Israelite widows and lepers had rejected Elijah and Elisha. Instead, they should follow the example of a Sidonian widow and Syrian leper who had trusted those same two prophets and thus received the assistance that they so desperately needed. This contrast infuriated his audience. Those present

“rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.”

But, the evangelist reports, “he passing through the midst of them went his way.”⁸

⁷ Luke 4.¹⁸⁻¹⁹

⁸ Luke 4.²⁹⁻³⁰

Notice how subdued and understated this is. No explanation. No fanfare. No thunder and lightning. No warning voices from heaven. No trembling of the earth. Jesus simply passes through without a word or extraordinary act.

For those looking, Jesus' greatness and power would not be found in his own acts of self-preservation. His power would not be used for his own self-aggrandizement. Messianic greatness, power, and, ultimately, victory would come through loss of self, through rejection, through suffering, and through death. Jesus would, himself, exhibit his true greatness in dying to serve and save others. Jesus' greatest power would be exercised from the height of a condemning and humiliating cross rather than the royal trappings of a glittering golden throne

Having completed his descent from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus was met by a father and his demon possessed son who was in need of an exorcism—a throng of onlookers surrounding them. It is a fascinating story with much to teach us. But we must stay on point.

Needless to say, Jesus healed the afflicted youth. As always, those who witnessed the healing “were all amazed at the mighty power of God.” “But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did,” Jesus, turning his attention to his disciple, addressed them directly and privately,

“Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.”

At the very first opportunity after the manifestations of his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration and the manifestation of his power in healing the demon possessed youth, Jesus took his disciples aside for a private moment of instruction. In that instruction, Jesus unsheathed his pin and popped another bubble. Jesus could not be too careful. He felt the need to pop every and any false notion concerning what these things meant; what they suggested about him; what they said about his greatness and power.

In epiphany like fashion, Peter gloriously declared Jesus to be the Christ. Lest Peter and the other disciples apply a false meaning to Jesus' Messiahship, Jesus immediately followed this confession up with his bubble busting warning of his future and personal humiliation.

Rebuked by Peter for what sounded to him like heterodoxic pessimism, Jesus identified Satan as the source of such an apostolic rebuke. Further, he instructed his disciples that all those who chose to follow him would be required to apply the same self-sacrificing attitude and behavior in their lives that Jesus exhibited and would exhibit in his.

Just days later, while sleep-walking through a heavenly discussion about Jesus' future rejection and death, the disciples saw Jesus' divine glory burst forth on the Mount of Transfiguration. In Peter's suggestion that the event be memorialized through the construction of three monuments, we sense the apostles' wonder and their hopeful expectations rise once more. No doubt this wonder and sense of a glorious future rose yet more as they witnessed additional evidence of his glory and power in the healing of the demon possessed youth. Hoping to tap down a resurging and false expectation concerning Jesus and his irresistible dominance in this world, Jesus took the very first opportunity he had to be alone with his disciples to once more burst their bubble of false expectations.

“Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.”

If “these sayings” sank down at all in the disciples, their sinking down, at least at the time, served only to confuse and perplex and discourage rather than inform and inspire and motivate. We cannot be too hard on the disciples. The world that Jesus envisioned, the world he came to establish is, indeed, as his mother prophesied, a topsy-turvy world. It stands in stark contrast to the world as it existed then and as it exists today. The world, to this day, has not understood the true nature of Jesus' greatness and power or the nature of greatness and power as it exists in the heavens or as exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Today is as good a time as any for us to come to terms with the level of self-sacrifice that is

required of us if we are to become the true disciples that we wish to be. It is a good time to exercise whatever humble levels of greatness and power that we possess as he did; to use them for the advancement of others and to reject all thought of self-aggrandizement. Today is as good a time as any to acknowledge and confess that until we do so, we act only to repeat Peter's satanic rebuke of the Lord Jesus and to frustrate our greatest hopes for true greatness, real power, and enduring eternal glory.

And, as always, today is as good a time as any to ask yourself, "How am I doing in my exercise of power, such as it is?" How are others whom you think great and who wield power doing? Are they following, or striving to follow as best they can the divine example of true greatness and real power that Jesus so perfectly exemplified? If they are not, are you bold enough and faithful enough to admonish them? Are you bold enough and faithful enough to turn away from them if they refuse correction and repentance? Are you enough of a disciple of Jesus to do that? The world is counting on just such bold and faithful discipleship. It is counting on you.

"With my whole heart have I sought thee:

O let me not wander from thy commandments.

Thy word have I hid in mine heart,

that I might not sin against thee.

Blessed art thou, O Lord:

*teach me thy statutes. "*⁹

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

⁹ Psalm 119.¹⁰⁻¹²

Part 4—what was it that ye disputed?

Mark 9.³³⁻³⁷

³³And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, “What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?”

³⁴But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. ³⁵And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

³⁶And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, ³⁷“Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.”

Introduction to today’s homily

After hearing Peter’s confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and sensing in it a misunderstanding concerning himself, his Messiahship, and the true nature of his greatness and power, Jesus issued his first direct warning concerning his impending rejection, suffering, and death.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed...”

At the same time, Jesus also issued a promise of resurrection. But this went right over his disciples’ head, thus failing to provide the comfort that it might have lent. All the disciples heard was Jesus’ intimation of failure. Therefore, Jesus immediately found himself on the receiving end of a rebuke, as Peter pushed back against what was to him the heretical notion of Messianic failure. Jesus offered his own push back by naming Peter’s attitude “satanic.” He then declaring that not only would he, Jesus, suffer loss as the world counted it, but that any who might choose to become his disciples would also be required to follow his example

and suffer similar loss—loss that would be patterned after his cross. Only through such loss could there be any true gain.¹

According to the synoptic Gospels' chronology, just a little more than a week later, we find Jesus on a mount that would become known in Christendom as "The Mount of transfiguration." Here, Jesus was "transfigured" and met with two of the greatest Hebrew prophets, Moses and Elijah. We do not know all that they discussed, but we do know that they "spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." But, we are informed, "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep."

This report concerning the slumber of discipleship has little to do with the very real human need for physical sleep. Rather, in this sacred text and in Luke's hands, the disciples' slumber signifies their continued misunderstanding of Jesus and their resistance to any possibility of loss on the part of the man who, they had intuited, was Messiah. Though they could not face his "weakness" and loss, the disciples were entirely able to appreciate his "greatness" and "gain." So it is that Luke follows up on his notice of slumber with a notice of "awake-ness."

"And when they were awake, they saw his glory..."

Jesus discerned that on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the face of the witness of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets—and angelic ones at that!—his disciples had, once more, learned all the wrong lessons about him and the true nature of his greatness and power. They remained resistant to any and every intimation of failure, weakness, and loss on his part but alive to every intimation of greatness and power. Thus, at the earliest possible moment when he could spend some private time with his disciples, Jesus issued his second direct warning:

"Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men."

¹ We examined these events and offered thoughts and commentary on them in the first two homilies of this series: "Part 1: Apostolic Confession and Rebuke" (Matthew 16.¹³⁻²³), and "Part 2: Take up His Cross" (Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶).

“But,” we are informed, “they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.”²

Make no mistake about it, it wasn't some external or cosmic force that kept the truth “hid from them” so that they “perceived it not.” It was their own misunderstandings, built on false traditions, personal biases, and private fears. Jesus would need to be pointed and persistent as he sought to undo his disciples' false notions about the nature of true greatness and real power as it related to both himself and any future disciples. Jesus remained on the lookout for occasions when he could teach and demonstrate, both in word and deed, the true nature of greatness and power—not only his own, but that of all who would be disciples.

The events reported in today's reading, not only represent one such occasion, but also demonstrate just how ingrained the world's false traditions concerning the nature of greatness and power were even in Jesus' closest disciples, and just how difficult it would be to reverse these false traditions. Unfortunately, the world, at both the private and public level, in both individual and societal behaviors continues to ignore his warnings and act in ways that defy his teachings. The world continues in open rebellion against his revelation concerning the true nature of greatness and power. Its inhabitants continue to resist the revelation that would make of them true children of God, trustworthy of an exalted existence in eternity.

What was it that ye disputed

We are unsure of the Mount of Transfiguration's location and so cannot say how long the trip was from that mount to Capernaum, where the events found in today's reading took place.³ We cannot say, then, how long it has been since Jesus pointedly issued his second warning concerning his looming rejection and death. But, in both Luke and Mark, today's text follows immediately upon that second warning with the text's notice that the disciples remained

² We examined these events and offered thoughts and commentary on them in the third homily of this series: “Part 3: Let these things sink down into your ears” (Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}).

³ If the mount was in the area of Caesarea Philippi, then it was some 40-50 north of Capernaum as the crow flies—so 1 long day's or 2 short day's journey.

clueless.⁴

Though we do not know how long the journey was, we do know the nature of conversation that passed back and forth between the disciples as they traveled to Capernaum.⁵ Luke reports that “there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest”⁶—this, just two verses after his clarifying, yet unheeded warning that his true greatness would be found in his rejection and death!

Now, the Greek word that the King James translators translated as “reasoning” in Luke’s account is *dialogismós*. The verb (*dialogízomai*) can mean “to reason together” or “discuss.” However, it can also mean to “to dispute,” “to argue.” Mark utilized the same root in describing the disciples’ “reasoning,” but, here, King James translators chose to translate the same verb as “dispute.”

It seems highly unlikely that the disciples were engaged in some sort of personally detached and cold academic discussion concerning the nature of greatness and who—especially amongst themselves—could be thought of as the greatest. No, it seems to me that “disputed” or “argued” is the translation that more accurately reflects the likely mood of the discussion. It seems far more likely that the disciples engaged in a lively debate about which of them and their contributions were most valued, and thus, “greatest.”

Indeed, Mark reports that some time after⁷ the events recorded in today’s reading James and John requested that they be granted the privilege of place at Jesus’ right and left hand when he entered his “glory.” In recording this same request, Matthew has it coming from the mouth of the two brothers’ mother. Whether the request came from their own mouths or that

⁴ In Matthew there is a very brief account of Jesus being questioned about paying taxes. After his clever reply, Jesus tells Peter to go to the shoreline, cast in a fishhook, catch a fish, dig a coin out of its mouth, and pay the tax therewith. If the chronology is to be trusted as “literal,” even with the tax episode taking place between the time Jesus’ party left the mount and this discussion took place, not many days need have passed between Jesus’ warning and his discussion about the disciples’ dispute.

⁵ Matthew has it that a question about “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven,” was put directly to Jesus.

⁶ Luke 9.⁴⁶

⁷ While Matthew and Luke report a great many events and teachings between the events in today’s reading and this one, very little takes place between the two events in Mark’s Gospel.

of their mother's, and whether little or much time had passed between the dispute that erupted on the journey to Capernaum and this request, the request was not appreciated by the other disciples. Mark informs us that “when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John;”⁸ while Matthew records that “the ten... were moved with indignation against the two brethren.”⁹

If we can be honest with ourselves long enough to pull our heads out of the sand, we will admit, however reluctantly, that such discussions about personal greatness and honor and prestige are rarely conducted out of simple and detached curiosity or intellectual investigation. Any such concerns almost inevitably devolve into an attempt to establish priority of rank, putting one up and putting another down. Such attempts, so inconsistent with the character of Jesus—the actual “greatest of all”¹⁰—inevitably produce hard feelings and lead to rivalries. These rivalries, as often as not, turn emotionally aggressive and even physically violent.

The disciples’ “dispute” never takes a turn into its ugliest manifestations, but one senses that this was the result of Jesus’ charismatic character rather than any self-control or personal exceptionalism on the part of the disciples. We really need not use our imagination to imagine what might have become of the disciples and the relationships that existed between them without Jesus’ wise tutelage. Examples of the destructiveness of the worldly drive for greatness and power are a dime a dozen in every clime and every age of world history.

They held their peace

If unsure about our characterization of the mood of the disciples’ “dispute,” we might want to consider their response to Jesus’ question: “What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?”

Mark informs us that “they held their peace.” It seems likely that they wanted to “keep their

⁸ Mark 10.⁴¹. We will return to examine this episode in detail in a future homily in this series.

⁹ Matthew 20.²⁴

¹⁰ See DC 19.¹⁸

dispute to themselves” not out of any desire for personal privacy, but because they knew Jesus well enough to know that he would not be pleased. We can imagine that Jesus might have been pleased with any discussion of greatness and power in which each disciple yielded pride of place to another. But, of course, their silence evidences that this was not the nature of their dispute. They had been arguing and they had been jockeying for position, staking out territory. They had been caught red-handed with their hand in the cookie jar and had no excuse for their conduct. But, give them credit, they knew better than try to lie to him who was the Spirit of Truth.

Servant of all

Obviously, whether Jesus had in fact overheard their conversation and hoped that his disciples would fess up to their argument, or discerned their thoughts in the moment, or simply knew the heart of the natural man, Jesus didn't need them to tell him what they had been disputing. He knew. This is proven by his subsequent words, and then actions. First, his words.

“If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

Once more, Jesus makes clear that true greatness and power look very different in his kingdom than in the kingdoms of this world.

Now, it seems to me that Jesus should not be understood here as giving legitimacy to the “desire to be first” and so simply telling his disciples how to go about achieving that end. One does not become truly great and powerful by developing and carry out strategies. True greatness and power are matters of character. And, as Mary learned by revelation and her own experiences, the development of a godly character that rejected and reversed false notions of greatness and power flowed out of God's labors in individual lives and societal structures.

“He hath shewed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.”¹¹

As Jesus strives to help his disciples understand the nature of true greatness and real power, he presses upon them the same spirit of reversal that his mother possessed and that she had sought to impress upon him. The truly great and powerful give up, as Jesus (and, undoubtedly his Father) had, all thoughts and desires of mastery over others. True disciples seek to become servants. The word, here, is not “slave.” Rather, in the mundane and secular world it was “one who waited at table” (*diákonos*). The greatest and most powerful in the kingdom of God are, as Jesus himself, waiters. They perform the menial and thankless jobs of filling others’ plates with food, filling their glasses with drink, and doing all that they can to see that their dining guests have the best possible experience.

This is so utterly contrary to every worldly notion of greatness and power that perhaps we should not be too hard on the disciples for the lack of imagination that kept them from understanding Jesus’ radically new view. The world today, after all, still hasn’t been able to imagine it, let alone put it into practice. We are paying a high price for this intransigence indeed.

h
e took a child

In his attempt to assist his disciples in understanding the sort of greatness and power that existed in his Father’s kingdom, Jesus, on a number of occasions, utilized children as object lessons. Mark has Jesus teach that greatness and power was to be found in the willing “reception” of children. To illustrate this “reception,” Jesus “took” a child, “set” the child “in the midst of them,” and then took the child “in his arms.” In so doing, Jesus showed his love,

¹¹ Luke 1.⁵¹⁻⁵³

appreciation, and care for who and what the child was.

Matthew makes it clear that Jesus' disciples were not to become so focused on the object of the lesson that they missed the point of the lesson. Yes, he would be pleased to have them "receive" and serve children. This was a sign of greatness and a true exercise of power. But, just as importantly, he would have them become, themselves, more childlike.

"Verily I say unto you, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'"¹²

In our post-World War II world with its extraordinary take on children and childhood and its belief that the young are to be protected, and pampered, and cherished, we often do not fully appreciate Jesus' uncommon view and treatment of children. And, with our domesticated and self-serving notions of "humility," we do not appreciate the radical nature of Jesus' own self-sacrifice and that which is expected of one who would claim to be his disciple.

In the past hundred years or so, the view of children and childhood has been powerfully transformed. For most of human history, children were viewed more as economic resources—property, really—than cuddly infants or entertaining toddlers or pride-inducing youth. Male children particularly possessed tremendous economic potential. They were often forced into labor activities, often violently, at ages and in ways that would offend every modern-day sensibility. The treatment of girls and young women in the pre-modern world was even more precarious and would offend our every modern sensibility even more. Female children were less economically valued than their male siblings and, indeed, were often viewed as a drag on the family's financial prospects. Unfortunately, being the devalued property that they were, they could and often were used to provide sexual release to fathers, brothers, cousins, uncles, business associates, politicians, etc.¹³

¹² Matthew 18.³⁻⁴

¹³ Studies to determine such things are, of course, non-existent, but it is likely that a significant percentage of the female population did not have their first sexual experience under conditions that they controlled and with partners who loved and cherished them. Indeed, the percentage of women so blessed is, to this day, far less than it out to be with studies suggesting that up to a quarter of all women experience some

It is in this context of childhood vulnerability that we should understand Jesus' admonition concerning "humility." As with every discussion of the attribute, "humility," we often domesticate the idea. This domestication makes us feel better, but it is untrue to the trait and causes us to miss the difficult point that Jesus is making here—perhaps missing the point is the point? Only in a delusional fantasyland world of make believe is the sort of "humility" of which Jesus speaks transformed into the pleasantries of "meekness" or "teachability." No, Jesus knows what we refuse to see: that the "humility" (or humiliation) of a child is found in his or her many vulnerabilities and the abuses that come to them as a result.¹⁴

"Surely, Jesus would not expect us to be doormats." I've heard this one dozens of times. But, of course, he does. He himself was a doormat. He *was* rejected. He *did* suffer. He *did* allow weaker men to murder him. He *did* suffer loss. He *did* make himself vulnerable in these and many, many other ways—why, simply taking a body and coming to earth opened him, God, up to a host of vulnerabilities. He *did* become the least of all—viewed as a criminal justly executed. He *did* act as server rather than master. And in all of this he showed his greatness and his power. This is what a God does. This is what all those who would have themselves called "disciples of Christ" do; this is how disciples of Christ show themselves to be true disciples, exhibit their greatness, and exercise their power.

Yes, Jesus' is a super-charged radicalness from which it is tempting to turn away.

I'll let the reader decide which is the more radical of the two: the idea that true greatness and real power is found in a waiter and his service or in the vulnerability of a child. Neither holds much attraction. Hence our acrobatic attempts to redefine "humility" and insulate ourselves from Jesus' challenging expectations of servitude.

Again, we can forgive the disciples their obtuseness. This radical view of greatness and power was, after all, brand spanking new. They had had little time to consider and examine

form of unwanted and unsolicited sexual attention—abuse, molestation, rape, etc.—before they experience the sort of conventional sexual relations that we associate with love and marriage.

¹⁴ The principle Hebrew word translated as humble has just this meaning, "to be vulnerable," "to be oppressed."

it. But we, today? We have had two thousand years to ponder upon it. We have had an addition two thousand years in which to examine it; another two thousand years in which greatness and power has been misunderstood and misused such as to bring suffering upon billions of souls.

We have had enough time to understand that such motives and movements as America's "America 1st" or "MAGA" with its extreme hubris are contrary to both the character of God and his expectations of those who would claim the title of "disciple of Christ" or "Christian." Jesus was clear enough that we should be able to see the satanic inspiration that lies behind such grotesque rebellion against God.

No, we have little excuse. And time is running out.

Conclusion and benediction

Jesus would not always be with his disciples. When he was gone, they would be called upon to continue and expand his work. They would be viewed as great and powerful men. Indeed, they would exercise power in the Church and among its members. They would need to exhibit greatness and exercise this power in accordance with godly principles. These principles would run contrary to the world's false traditions. They would run contrary to the disciples' current understandings.

Jesus taught by word and demonstrated by deed the true nature of his own greatness and power. They were to be seen in his willing acceptance of personal loss so that gain might come to others. They would be found in his becoming last and putting others first. They would to be seen in his submission to rejection, suffering, humiliation, and death.

And what's more, his disciples would be asked, invited, to follow his example. But Jesus' disciples were unable or unwilling to wrap their brains, let alone their hearts around such a radical world view. We can see this played out in the debate—a debate they wished to keep from Jesus—that they carried out amongst themselves concerning which of them was the

greatest among them. So, once more, Jesus sought to instruct them, pointing to unappreciated waiters and vulnerable children as examples for them to follow.

This upside-down view of greatness and power was scandalous then. It is scandalous today. We avoid looking at it. Even more, we avoid acting upon it. We work hard to domesticate it and make it more in keeping with the traditions we have inherited and the lustful desires we possess. We suffer as individuals; we suffer as societies; we suffer as nations because of our stubborn resistance to heeding and following what looks to us through the lens of the world's twisted value systems as Jesus' absurd call to become the least and servant of all.

But today is as good a time as any to put away our false traditions and lustful desires. It is as good a time as any to follow Jesus' example of true greatness and real power. Today is as good a time as any to accept personal loss for the gain of others. It is as good a time as any to put others first. Today is as good a time as any to "suffer his cross and bear," as children do, "the shame of the world."¹⁵ Yes, today is as good a time as any for us to do all of this and to teach a world that is killing itself by its insatiable lust for false greatness and deadly power.

And yes, today is as good a time as any to ask "How am I doing in my exercise of power, such as it is?" How are others whom you think great and who wield power doing? Are they following, or striving to follow as best they can the divine example of true greatness and real power that Jesus so perfectly exemplified? If they are not, are you bold enough and faithful enough to admonish them? Are you bold enough and faithful enough to turn away from them if they refuse correction and repentance? Are you enough of a disciple of Jesus to do that? The world is counting on just such bold and faithful discipleship. It is counting on you.

*"Wait on the LORD,
and keep his way,
and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land:
when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.
I have seen the wicked in great power,
and spreading himself like a green bay tree.*

¹⁵ See Jacob 1.⁸

*Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not:
yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.”¹⁶*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

¹⁶ Psalm 37.³⁴⁻³⁶

Part 5—ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of
Luke 9.⁵¹⁻⁵⁶

⁵¹*When the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵²and sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. ⁵³And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”

⁵⁵But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” And they went to another village.

Introduction to today’s homily

It was in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus asked his question, “Whom say ye that I am.” It was in Caesarea Philippi that Peter answered immediately, “Thou are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” It was in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus followed this apostolic confession up with a warning concerning his upcoming rejection, suffering, and death. It was in Caesarea Philippi that Peter immediately rebuked Jesus for such negativity and his unfaithfulness to Peter’s idea of Jesus, his Messiahship, and his greatness and power. It was in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus firmly identified Peter’s false ideas of Jesus, his Messiahship, and the nature of his greatness and power as selfish and, worse, satanic.¹

It was in Caesarea Philippi, too, that Jesus began to teach that not only he, but all those who would be his disciples would be required to lose themselves, deny themselves in order to find and save themselves. True greatness and power—that of Master and follower—was to be found in taking up the cross² and losing themselves in the service and advancement others.

¹ All of this is examined in Part 1 of this series.

² This is examined in Part 2 of this series.

It was a mere six or eight days later, depending on the Gospel writer, that the disciples found themselves with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Here they were alert to Jesus' glory as he met with Moses and Elijah. But they slumbered in denial as the three great Hebrew prophets discussed Jesus' upcoming rejection and death in the nation's capital, Jerusalem. Observing his disciple's continued resistance to any suggestion of his failure—and their continued willful misunderstanding concerning the true nature of his greatness and power—Jesus took the first possible opportunity he had to be alone with his disciples to reissue his dire warning of rejection and death.

“Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.”³

Shortly after the warnings and admonitions at Caesarea Philippi and at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus either overheard or discerned his disciples' argument concerning which of them would be greatest in the kingdom of God—an argument that is both startling and telling in view of the previous instruction and warnings Jesus had only recently provided. Understanding that his disciples had not yet grasped the self-denial that was part and parcel of true greatness and real power, Jesus brought forth a child to illustrate true greatness. The child represented the sort of submission and humility (humiliation) that was required for entrance into that glorious kingdom.⁴

In today's text, Jesus and his disciples are, as they so often are, on the road again. As they approach a Samaritan village, they send messengers ahead to announce his arrival. Perhaps he seeks rest and refreshment for himself and his disciples. Perhaps he plans to teach the village's populace as is his habit. Either way, the Samaritans make it known that they want nothing to do with him. He is denied entrance to the city. His disciples are incensed by the Samaritans' rejection of Jesus—surprise!—and suggest that maybe a violent, retributive act is in order. Jesus sees yet again, that his disciples have no clue concerning the nature of greatness and power—his own or that of those who would enter the Father's kingdom. Thus,

³ We examined the events on the Mount of Transfiguration along with Jesus' renewed warning in Part 3 of this series.

⁴ We examined this episode in Part 4 of this series.

he firmly rebuff's their inappropriate response to his rejection, and instructs them once more.

he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem

As we meet Jesus and his disciples in today's text, they are headed south out of Galilee and into Judah, with Jerusalem as their final destination. At least, that is the disciples' view. But what is Jesus' view as he walks south toward Jerusalem? When he looks forward to arrival in Jerusalem, what does he see? Among other things, he sees that Jerusalem is not, in fact, his final destination. Rather, Jerusalem will serve as a springboard. For it is from there that he will "be received up." He is headed to Jerusalem for his ascension. His final destination is heaven, with the seat on the right hand of God that is awaiting him.

Of course, he knows that much will transpire before he finally ascends. There will be rejection and humiliation. There will be much suffering and there will be an agonizing death. Nevertheless, Jesus' faith in his Father and his commitment to do his Father's will is such that nothing can deter him. Thus, we are informed, he traveled with his face set in determination and resolve as "he *steadfastly* set his face to go to Jerusalem."

As Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem with steadfastness, we can almost read his courageous thoughts. They sound much like the words that he will later speak openly when Peter unsheathes his sword to protect Jesus from arrest:

"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"⁵

"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"⁶

Jesus had many things to do and say. They were all of immense importance, both to

⁵ John 18.¹¹

⁶ Matthew 25.²³⁻²⁴

individuals and societies, in time and in eternity. But above all else, Jesus testified, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”⁷ And, come what may, he was determined to do that holy will until that day on which “he should be received up.” He would then, from a new and holier sphere, continue to do “the will of him that sent me.”

They did not receive him

But, on the way to his heavenly throne, he would pass through the district of Samaria. We should say a word or two about the people known as Samaritans.

Upon returning to their promised land after the Babylonian exile, exiled Jews found a population whom they thought of as “half-breeds.” These were people descended from lower class Israelites, whom first the Assyrians and then the Babylonians had left behind to work the land and provide tax revenues, and “gentiles.” Afflicted with xenophobic fears, prejudices, and hatreds, the returning Jews wanted nothing to do with these “half-breed” Samaritans. Jewish fear and prejudice and hatred for the Samaritans resulted in the latter’s religious disenfranchisement, including exclusion from the temple in Jerusalem.

Unsurprisingly, the Samaritans responded in kind, going so far as to build their own temple on Mount Gerizim, home to one of the most ancient sacred sites in the land. The back-and-forth hatreds and incriminations that pass between modern day Israelis and Palestinians have nothing on those that passed between Jews and Samaritans. Only our “improvements” in the technology of violence and institutional murder have changed.

So it was that when the Samaritans realized that Jesus was headed to Jerusalem, likely to attend a Passover festival from which they themselves were so hatefully excluded, they denied him entrance to the city, the benefits of its accommodations, and open, listening ears.

⁷ John 6.³⁸

This cultural and retaliatory Samaritan refusal of hospitality infuriated Jesus' disciples. No doubt, they were infuriated by the refusal itself. They have already shown themselves to be resistant to the possibility of any rejection or failure on Jesus' part. But it seems likely that centuries of hostility between Jew and Samaritan also played a role in the disciples' extremist response to the Samaritan snub.

Such "snubbery" of the Messiah, the disciple's concluded, was surely an offense, not only against Messiah, but against God as well. No doubt, the disciples were familiar with Yahweh's warning to those who "set themselves" against God and his anointed. "Why," asked God,

"Why do the heathen rage,
and the people imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD,
and against his anointed."

Then, in response to such vanity,

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:
the Lord shall have them in derision.
Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath,
and vex them in his sore displeasure."⁸

Such threats are ubiquitous in the Psalmist. No doubt, the disciples heard such threats read and quoted regularly in synagogue.

Perhaps Elijah was still on the disciples' minds after his visit with Jesus on the Mount of

⁸ See Psalm 1.^{1-2, 4-5}

Transfiguration; for it was from Elijah's ministry that the disciples found the perfect way to express God's wrath and to vex the Samaritans for the "rage" against and resistance to Jesus, Messiah, that they had manifested in their rejection of him. You might remember that Elijah had called down fire from heaven. Twice, in fact. Two times he had called down fire from heaven in order to burn Israelite military units of fifty to a crisp. Thus, taking Elijah as their example, the disciples boldly offered their proposal for righting the wrong done to Jesus.

"Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?"

It didn't hurt either, of course, that the response displayed a greatness and power that was appropriately violent, according to what the world expected a slight as this one to produce. At the same time, it represented a display of greatness and power that rose to appropriately otherworldly, cosmic proportions.

Yet another rebuke

But Jesus "turned, and rebuked them."

If, as you have followed Jesus and his disciples, you feel that there was a great deal of rebuking going on, you are not wrong. It wasn't all that long ago that Peter "rebuked" Jesus for having the audacity to suggest that he, Jesus, would experience rejection, suffering and death at the hands of wicked and inferior men. Jesus followed up Peter's rebuke with his own rebuke of Peter and his satanic inspired denial of Jesus' inspired foresight. Not long afterward, Jesus, using a child to exemplify the nature of true greatness, illustrated rather than spoke a rebuke of the disciples' argument over who would be the greatest in the kingdom—an argument for which they felt shame and tried to keep hidden from Jesus.

Now, here is Jesus rebuking his disciples once more. It should not be necessary to point out that each of these rebukes revolve around the nature of greatness and power and how they are manifested and practiced.

Contrary to the false worldly traditions that the disciples had inherited, including those they imagined that they had inherited from their beloved Hebrew forebearers, greatness and power are not manifest through the exercise of violence. They are not measured by one's ability to achieve violent retribution and pay back. The disciples' belief that Jesus might wish to exercise his greatness and power in such a worldly manner revealed two sad realities.

First, though the disciples knew not "what manner of spirit [they were] of," their instinctual desire to resort to violence revealed to Jesus, and anyone else who possessed even the smallest portion of the spirit, the kind of people they were. They were men thoroughly captured by a sinful world that took its cue from Satan—"I will buy up armies and navies and reign with blood and horror on the earth." It was his, Satan's, spirit of which they partook when they made their foul suggestion that fire be called down from heaven.

Worse yet, even after all that they had seen Jesus say and do they still did not perceive "what manner of spirit" Jesus was of. They did not understand the nature of his greatness and power and how he intended to use them. It had never occurred to him to punish the Samaritans for having turned him away. It never *could* occur to him. It was utterly contrary to the "manner of spirit" that possessed him. It was contrary to his character, incompatible with his disposition. How, after all this time, could they not understand that "the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them"? It takes little power to destroy—it is, in fact the universe's natural entropic way. It takes far, far greater power to save. This power to halt and reverse destructive power and to exercise saving and restorative power is one of the things that makes God, God.

They went to another village

Having allowed Jesus to make this point, the text states simply, "And they went to another village." Talk about understatement!

As we leave the village behind, in our mind's eye we look back over our shoulder to gaze

at the Samaritan village. We imagine what might have been had the spirit of which the disciples were had had its way. We imagine burnt out husks of blackened buildings. We imagine trees with their blackened trunks turned to carbon and reaching forlornly into an angry sky. We imagine blackened hunks of roasted human flesh; corpses burnt into stiffened, unnatural, inhuman, and grotesque shapes and poses and postures.

But, thanks to Jesus, as we gaze back at the village we see it glistening in the late evening sun as it was the night before and the night before that. We see a city that has been delivered from the threat of fire from heaven. We see a people that might well have been burnt to a crisp but for Jesus and the way he exercises greatness and true power. Yes, we see a city populace oblivious to the fact that Jesus has saved their lives.

If Jesus looked for accommodations or listening ears, he would find them elsewhere without giving the Samaritans and their inhospitality another thought. He would bear no grudge. If he thought of them at all, he no doubt felt joy that they remained alive—alive to repent another day. If he thought of them at all, he mourned that he had captured no listening ear to hear his message of deliverance—deliverance from spiritual death as well as violent physical death.

Conclusion and benediction

It's a hard nut to crack... this false idea concerning the nature of true greatness and real power. It's a hard nut to crack... this false idea that greatness and power are to be used for personal advancement, even if by violent means. Notwithstanding his example and his instruction, Jesus is having a heck of a time getting through to his disciples. They cannot fathom a future in which Jesus' greatness and power fails him. They cannot fathom the idea that he would not exercise his greatness and power to protect and boost himself and his righteous goals. They anticipate the magnification of their own greatness and power and jockey for position in the anticipated kingdom of God. And they will not countenance any slight to Jesus Messianic glory, especially since any slight against him reflects upon them.

So it is that when a people already despised openly slights the Messiah, the disciples are ready to offer a demonstration of his and their greatness and power. This demonstration of

greatness and power will come through the means that this world's great and powerful ones always utilize to demonstrate their greatness and power: coercive, destructive violence.

But Jesus knows and sees such demonstrations of greatness and power for what they are. They are of a different spirit than he. They are of the spirit of the devil. And he will not partake. The prince of this world may come, but it will find no home in Jesus. But as important as his rejection of the evil is, his adoption of the good is even more important. He not only refuses to destroy, he lives to save and deliver. So, he delivers the Samaritans from the common worldly response to slights and offenses and rejections. He delivers them from the violent intentions of his clueless disciples. But for Jesus, we might have had another Sodom and Gomorrah on our hands. As it is, Jesus abandons all grievance against the Samaritans and leaves them in peace, giving them another day.

Two millennia have passed since Jesus warned us and warned us and warned us again. For two millennia those who claim discipleship to Jesus have been reading the sacred texts that pass his warnings on to the latest generation. For two millennia they have rejected his counsel. For two millennia they have gone on in the satanic exercise of false greatness and power. For two millennia they have “raged” and “set themselves” “against the Lord, and against his anointed” through their vain pursuit and destructive use of false greatness and demonic power.

How many more days, do you suppose, do we have? How many more days will be granted leave to act upon Satan's false ideas concerning the nature of true greatness and real power? How much longer before it catches up with us? How many more days before our continual and continuous resort to violent demonstrations of greatness and power finally comes boomeranging back upon us? For, make no mistake about it, it is not the wrath of God we should fear, but the wrath of humankind.

“Behold, the judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished; for it is the wicked that stir up the hearts of the children of men unto bloodshed.”⁹

⁹ Mormon 4.⁵

Yes, it is God's judgment, God's decision, God's choice that when the wicked suffer for their wickedness—and they do and will—the suffering will at their own hands and of their own doing rather than his, just as the law of restoration calls for.

Thanks be to God that standing outside a Samaritan village on a spring day, the Lord, Jesus resisted his disciples' wicked desire to punish those whom they perceived as wicked. Thanks be to God that he calmed the disciples' hearts and showed them the way of peace and salvation that his greatness and his power sought.

So, how am you doing in your exercise of power, such as it is? How are others whom you think great and who wield power doing? Are they following, or striving to follow as best they can the divine example of true greatness and real power that Jesus so perfectly exemplified? If they are not, are you bold enough and faithful enough to admonish them? Are you bold enough and faithful enough to turn away from them if they refuse correction and repentance? Are you enough of a disciple of Jesus to do that? The world is counting on just such bold and faithful discipleship. It is counting on you.

*God hath spoken once;
twice have I heard this;
that power belongeth unto God.
Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy:
for thou renderest to every man according to his work.*"¹⁰

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

¹⁰ Psalm 62.¹¹⁻¹²

Part 6—even the son of man came not to ministered unto, but to minister

Mark 10.³⁵⁻⁴⁵

³⁵And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, “Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.”

³⁶And he said unto them, “What would ye that I should do for you?”

³⁷They said unto him, “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.”

³⁸But Jesus said unto them, “Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

³⁹And they said unto him, “We can.”

And Jesus said unto them, “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: ⁴⁰but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”

⁴¹And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. ⁴²But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, “Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. ⁴³But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: ⁴⁴And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Introduction to today's homily

It is beginning to sound like a broken record. Jesus' disciples have no clue. Like us. Today. Two thousand years later.

The disciples do not understand the nature of Jesus' greatness and power. They did not understand it on the day that they, with Peter as mouthpiece for them and for Satan, rebuked Jesus—him whom they had just moments earlier confessed, “Messiah”—for his intimation of failure; for his warning that he would be rejected and killed by inferior men.¹

On that selfsame day, they did not understand that his “taking up his cross” was the ultimate manifestation of his greatness and power. And they did not understand, or care to understand

¹ Part 1 of this series

that they would be required to demonstrate their own greatness and power by the same means—by taking up their cross and following Jesus in self-sacrifice for the good and salvation of others.²

Jesus' disciples did not understand the nature of Jesus' greatness and power days later when, bedazzled by the majesty they witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration, they slept through the inspired and inspiring discussion between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus concerning Jesus' "decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."³ They were without discernment when upon the first opportunity afforded him, Jesus attempted just hours later to redirect their attention from the glory of the moment to the real indicator of his greatness and power.

“Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.’ But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.”⁴

They did not understand the nature of true greatness and power—their own or Jesus’—when, almost in the next breath, Jesus, seeking to tap down an argument that raged between them about which of them would be greatest in the kingdom, presented them with servants and children as models of greatness and power in God’s kingdom.⁵

And they did not understand the nature of true greatness and power—their own or Jesus’—when Jesus came under necessity of once more rebuking them: this time for their ungodly desire to demonstrate greatness and power through the traditional worldly means of violent devastation and death, this time upon a Samaritan village that disrespected their beloved Messiah.

“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”⁶

² Part 2 of this series

³ Luke 9.³¹

⁴ Luke 9.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵. Part 3 of this series

⁵ Part 4 of this series

⁶ Luke 9.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁶

To engage in violence in defense of Jesus and his kingdom was and is to “know not what manner of spirit ye are of”—the “manner of spirit” being worldly and satanic. And, of course, the salvation of others that Jesus so desperately sought would come at his own expense and his own violent death.⁷

With today’s reading, Mark seems to be in full, all-out, no-holds-barred ironic mode. Here is the lead up to today’s reading.

“And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, ³³Saying, ‘Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: ³⁴and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.’”⁸

This, Jesus’ third warning of his imminent rejection and death, is the most detailed of the three so far. His two previous warnings were issued in response and correction to the disciples’ clear misunderstanding of him and the nature of his greatness and power. He would have them understand that his greatness and power are best seen in his willing suffering and death.

We have then, every right to be shocked and disappointed when we read, as we do in today’s text, that the disciples are once more at each other’s throats, vying and jockeying for position, for greatness, and for power in God’s kingdom. And we are amazed at Jesus’ patience as he once more walks his disciples through the nature of true greatness and real power—theirs and his.

⁷ Part 5 of this series

⁸ Mark 10.³²⁻³⁴

do for us whatsoever we shall desire

“We want.” After getting Jesus’ attention with “Master,” this is the first word out of their mouths. “We want.”⁹

“We want.”

“We want.”

Have you noticed how our wants seem never to end? How they seem to know no bounds? How we never seem to be able to get or have enough? As soon as we have acquired the last thing we wanted, we find a new want for the next thing growing in the space vacated by the last want. We are insatiable.

And speaking of insatiable, just have a listen to what the disciples’ “want.” “We want you to do for us whatever we ask,” they say to Jesus. “We want you to do for us whatever enters our noggins.” They want a blank check.

When Jesus replies, “What do you want me to do for you?” they go for broke. They go all in. Go for the whole kit and caboodle.

“Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.”

They don’t ask much. They will happily yield the number one spot to Jesus for the honor of being numbers 2 and 3. How magnanimous. I guess they missed synagogue the day that this bit of the Psalmist’s perspective on the humility of discipleship was shared.

⁹ It makes no difference that in Matthew it is the two boys’ mother who makes the request; for when Jesus suggests they may not be up to snuff, it is they would assure Jesus that they most assuredly up to the privilege they seek. See Matthew 20.¹⁷⁻²⁸ for his account of the two disciples proposed transaction.

“A day in thy courts is better than a thousand.

I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God,
than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”¹⁰

I guess you might feel that I am being a little hard on the fellas. But, come on! This is why we took the time in our introductory remarks to this homily to review the number of times Jesus had warned against, essentially, the very question that the two disciples were now posing. Jesus has been over this with his disciples... again and again and again.

Maybe the disciples were playing hooky the day Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.”¹¹ Or when he said, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”¹² Or maybe they were absent the day he warned, “They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”¹³ Maybe they were asleep when he just moments before this one he announced that “many that are first shall be last; and the last first.”¹⁴ Maybe they didn’t realize there was a principle to be applied to themselves when Jesus complained, “Woe unto you, Pharisees! For ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.”¹⁵

In reporting the disciples’ earlier bickering over status in the kingdom and now this request for pride of place, the Gospels are doing more than reporting a couple of moments of lapse in discipleship. They are informing us by these accounts that the disciples’ misunderstanding concerning the nature of greatness and power and this desire to excel above others—including their closest companions—was incessant. It was, as it is in today’s world, a pattern of ungodly thought and behavior. No, we are not being too hard on them.

¹⁰ Psalm 84.¹⁰

¹¹ Matthew 16.²⁴

¹² Luke 9.³⁵

¹³ Luke 13.²⁹⁻³⁰

¹⁴ Luke 10.³¹

¹⁵ Luke 11.⁴³

Rather than judging the disciples to be of bad character, Jesus chooses to believe that their blindness is the result of ignorance. So, rather than reacting, as before, with rebuke, he turns to instruction. He teaches. He asks his own question.

“Can ye drink the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

“We can,” they reply.

Talk about counting your chickens before they hatch! Why, they have no idea what kind of cup he will drink! They have no idea that he will drink a cup so bitter that it would cause him, “even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that [he] might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink.”¹⁶ They could not conceive any better than we can today with two thousand years under our belt to think and ponder on it that his cup would bring “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, *even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death.*”¹⁷ No, no one could drink the cup he drank and survive. If anyone else were so arrogant as to try, it could only end in certain personal annihilation.

No one could swim in the deep waters into which Jesus would be thrown—the very depths of hell. He would be engulfed by the unfathomably deep waters of the bottomless pit.

Who do these two insatiable disciples think they are? But, Jesus does not confront them with all this. They have, after all, already demonstrated their inability to grasp even earthly things. How can they be expected to grasp things with such cosmic depth and height and breadth and length?

So, what does Jesus mean when he affirms, “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of;

¹⁶ DC 19.¹⁸

¹⁷ Mosiah 3.⁷

and with the baptism that I am baptized”? Though they have rejected the reality of that which they do not understand—Jesus’ suffering, rejection, and death—they will face similar suffering, rejection, and even death for the cause. Their highs will not be as high or their lows as low as his, but they will have their highs and lows. They will experience what Jesus has warned them he would experience, though it be in kind, in quality only. Never, ever, anywhere near in quantity.

Yes, here we see Jesus being patient and merciful and longsuffering. We see him give them only a thimble full of insight, though even that thimble full was too much for them to comprehend.

They began to be much displeased

But the other disciples have been listening in on this clueless negotiation. And they are not abused, let alone so patient and understanding as Jesus.

“When the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.”

They were indignant. They were irritated. Very irritated. Immensely indignant. That’s what Mark’s “much displeased” tells us. “They began giving way to indignation.” They nurtured their indignation. Let it grow.

Were they indignant because the two brothers, unlike them, had clearly not yet comprehended Jesus’ repeated messages concerning the nature of true greatness and real power? Or were they indignant at the request itself and the “lordship” the request demonstrated that the two brothers wanted over the rest of them?

In light of their past, and given Jesus’ response to the ten’s current indignation, the former seems highly unlikely. No, they seem to have yielded to the natural man and given space to their own desire for greatness, prestige, and power by allowing their indignation to fester and grow.

With Jesus' instruction found in today's text, we come to the line that has headed our series: "So shall it not be among you."

First, the good news. Jesus, we are told, "gathered [the disciples] around him and said, 'You understand that those who are thought of as rulers among the nations govern to their own personal advantage, and that their great ones rule as they wish.'"¹⁸

The disciples are to be congratulated. It turns out that they are not complete dunces. They have, in fact, observed and properly discerned the ways of this world and the manner in which its notables exhibit greatness and exercise power. Bravo, disciples!

Now, the bad news. The disciples' discernment did not run so far or so deep as to allow them to perceive that such greatness and power, such rule and governance did not, could not, must not extend to Jesus or the kingdom as he envisioned it. No matter what eminence the future might grant them, his disciples could not act upon such twisted logic, no matter how inevitable it might present itself to be.

"But in no way, shape, or form is this sort of governance to be found among you. Rather whoever would be great among you is to have your interests first. And whoever would have precedence among you is to be servant of all."¹⁹

I have always wondered. Did Jesus simply mean that *whoever* ends up "at the top" is to conduct themselves as a servant as they occupy that "top spot"? Or, did Jesus mean that the community of believers are responsible to watch among themselves, identify those who are true servants, and then, establish the truest servant "at the top"? I am thinking the latter option has the best chance of producing a true "servant leader"—assuming the community can resist the allure of graft and corruption.

¹⁸ Author's translation

¹⁹ Author's translation

Whichever, in Jesus' instruction found here, we again witness Jesus acting upon one of his most foundational divinely appointed mandates—the one that his mother discerned so clearly even when her son was still in utero.

“He hath shewed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.”²⁰

the best news (gospel) of all

We have seen over and over again how utterly perplexing the disciples find Jesus' doctrine of true greatness and real power. They have had no experience with it. They have no example to which they can look in order to understand. Up until now, that is. But now, day in and day out Jesus acts out his doctrine of true greatness and real power in real time, right in front of the disciples' eyes. And by the time he is finished Jesus will have shown his disciples the truest form of greatness and the only manifestation of power that can create an enduring existence, and enduring community, and, indeed, an enduring universe. And we, all of us, are beneficiaries of Jesus' greatness and power. We, all of us, end up not only being served by the master server, but by a server who knows perfectly our every need.

“For even the Son of man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to gift his life, a ransom for the benefit of many.”²¹

The difference between Jesus and the powers that seek to rule in this world could not be more different. Their motives and methods are worlds apart. One comes from heaven and behaves in the way he has seen heaven behave. The other finds its origins in the darker nether

²⁰ Luke 1.⁵¹⁻⁵³

²¹ Author's translation

regions of hell and gets its inspiration from hell's ruler. One can be, must be transferred into the Church and its governance, the other must never ever see the light of day or be given the slightest bit of oxygen within the body of Christ.

the bad news today

Sadly, notwithstanding Christianity's advantage of having had two thousand years to observe and contemplate and practice Jesus' example of true greatness and real power, when we look out into the "Christian" world in which we live, we see the same type of demented and satanic leadership with the same warped sense of greatness and power that Jesus' disciples so clearly discerned in their day.

"Those who are thought of as rulers among the nations govern to their own personal advantage, and that their great ones rule as they wish"

Greatness and power continues to be used capriciously and abusively to further enrich and impower unscrupulous "lords." It turns out that today's leaders in industry, business, government, etc. are as often as not sociopaths. For nearly my entire lifetime, for example, American business has followed the psychopathy of the great (false) prophet of Neoliberalism, Milton Freidman, and those of his ilk who unashamedly uttered their false doctrines: doctrines such as, "a corporation that acts responsibly toward the community in which it does its business is shirking its only duty: to maximize its short-term stock valuation."²²

American presidents, legislators, and jurists have bought into this abomination and through it enriched themselves and their cronies while impoverishing millions—their own citizens and the children of God worldwide. It is impossible to imagine a theology and the perverted policies it has produced that are more at odds with Jesus' inspired doctrine and practice of true greatness and real power. It hardly seems possible that one could come up with a more

²² See, *The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government*, Mike Lofgren, chapter 7.

anti-Christ platform even if one set out to do just that—establish an anti-Christ platform. The brand of American capitalism that rules the world today is, in fact, so perfectly anti-Christ that one must assume that its “inspiration” originated with the greatest, most skilled of all anti-Christ, Lucifer. We must name it a revelation of satanic proportions. It has, does, and will damn those who pledge allegiance to it.

We focus so often on the economic evils of our day because they are in many ways the most obvious improper use of greatness and power. The effects of false economic doctrines are easily measurable in the number of homeless, the number of children who go to bed hungry, the number of people without adequate healthcare, and the number of billionaires who lord it over all (the increasing numbers of billionaires in our modern world is, itself, a manifestation of a system that is anti-Christ). And the ungodly use of greatness and power found in such false economic doctrines possesses tentacles that reach out to enwrap the entire culture in darkness. Even though most people are unaware of the economic doctrines that ungird American style capitalism, they see and feel them intuitively.

Thus we witness the many ways in which the economic doctrines and the false use of greatness and power that put self-gratification above basic and good moral and ethical principles—to say nothing of Christ-like service—metastasize into innumerable societal evils. As but one of these, we mention the recent choice by tens of millions of Americans to endanger their neighbors by refusing to wear masks, social distance, or obtain a vaccine that God in his mercy has gifted the world. This, like its hidden evil economic foundations, can hardly be more out of line with Christ and his doctrine of taking up one’s cross in order to serve others. Such exertions of privilege are not evidence of personal greatness or an exercise of real power. Rather, they reflect the world’s false ideas of greatness and power.

“Those who are thought of as rulers among the nations govern to their own personal advantage, and that their great ones rule as they wish.”

The sad truth is, our entire culture today is founded upon and maintained by the twisted perspectives toward greatness and power that has dominated the planet, not just since the days of Jesus’ disciples, but since the very beginnings of human society. It is Cain who is

credited with the great discovery: “A man may murder [conduct himself violently] and get gain”—gain in power, gain in greatness, gain in money, gain in prestige.

Gain, Gain. Gain. I want. I want. I want. Me. Me. Me. These are this world’s mantra and at the heart of the desire to possess greatness and exercising power.

Conclusion and benediction

When faced with Jesus’ brand of greatness and power, the disciples responded with satanic inspired rebuke. This is not the view of an opinionated writer, but of Jesus himself—“get thee behind me Satan,” he demands of Peter. When it became impossible to ignore Jesus self-sacrificing and servant-oriented brand of greatness and power, the disciples choose slumber and denial over truth. Notwithstanding Jesus’ day-in-and-day-out personal example of servant-style greatness and power, the disciples argued and fumed and schemed over which of them would wear the biggest crown and occupy the highest, most prestigious seat.

Jesus warned them over and over again not to be entrapped by the world’s false and self-serving doctrine of greatness and power. Greatness could never look, and power could never be exercised in the kingdom of God like the false and violent and destructive greatness and power that the rulers of this world utilize to serve their own ends and their own needs rather than to serve those whom they govern. Never. Never. Ever.

Rather, greatness and power in the Kingdom of God must be built on a willingness to sacrifice one’s own selfish interests for the good of all. Every day Jesus showed his disciples then, what that sort of greatness and power looked like. He suffered in Gethsemane and died at Golgotha to show them what it looked like. And today, on every page of the blessed Gospels, Jesus shows any and every sincere reader the path to greatness and power in the kingdom of God. It is way, way, way, way, way past time for individuals and nations who would call themselves “Christian” to pick up their cross and follow the Savior and Servant of the world down the Via Dolorosa. Only by so doing call they lay claim to the blessed title, “The Children of God.”

*“The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought:
he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.
The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever,
the thoughts of his heart to all generations.
Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord;
the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.
The Lord looketh from heaven;
he beholdeth all the sons of men.
From the place of his habitation
he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth.
He fashioneth their hearts alike;
he considereth all their works.
There is no king saved by the multitude of an host:
a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.
An horse is a vain thing for safety:
neither shall he deliver any by his great strength.
Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him,
upon them that hope in his mercy;
To deliver their soul from death,
and to keep them alive in famine.
Our soul waiteth for the Lord:
he is our help and our shield.”²³*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

²³ Psalm 33.¹⁰⁻²⁰