

Lent 5B, 2012

Text: Mark 10:32-45

Title: Knowing the Future

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How would you like to know the future? How would you like to know how your life will end up? It's fun to think about, and to dream about, especially when you're young with your whole life ahead of you. You like to imagine what your life will be like.

As you get older, you think more about the future of your kids and grandkids, if you've got them. You think about the future of your community, and of this planet for future generations.

We make plans for the future, we try to guess what will happen, especially as we make our investments and think about long term goals and strategies.

We can make pretty good guesses sometimes, especially about the basic facts of life. But none of us know all the details. None of us know for sure what lies ahead each and every day.

When it comes to important things, matters of life and death, we never know for sure what will happen. We don't know the details of our own death. We don't know when our last hour will come, or what it will be like.

But Jesus did. Jesus knew everything about His death, down to the last detail. Notice how specific Jesus is with the disciples. "See we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him."

Jesus knew what his last hours would be like. Jesus knew everything down to the last detail. Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him and hand Him over to the Jewish leaders. Jesus knew that the leaders would hand Him over to the Romans. Jesus knew about the jeers and insults, Jesus knew He would be beaten and spit upon, Jesus knew that he would be whipped and nailed to the cross.

What would you do, if you knew that that kind of suffering and death lay ahead for you? What would you do if you knew every last detail?

I know what I would do. I would head the other way. I would run in the opposite direction.

Remember what Jonah did when the Lord called him to preach in Nineveh? He boarded the first boat heading in the opposite direction.

That would have been me. Run away!

But what does Jesus do? Does Jesus hide in Galilee, hoping the Jews and Romans don't come looking for Him? Does Jesus run away, maybe head north to Syria, or catch a boat across the Mediterranean? Does Jesus try to change things, maybe by getting rid of Judas?

No.

Not only does Jesus go willingly to Jerusalem, but He leads the way! He is the one coaxing the rest of the group along. Jesus is walking ahead of them out in front. Everyone else is afraid. Everyone else is hanging back.

But not Jesus. Jesus almost seems eager to go to Jerusalem. He almost seems eager to die.

Yes, Jesus knew about the resurrection. Yes, Jesus knew that He would rise again. But that doesn't make it any easier. It doesn't make His suffering any less painful.

Now James and John wanted to go straight to the resurrection and the glory part. They wanted to avoid Good Friday and go straight to Easter.

When it's all said and done, Jesus, we want to be your top men. We want to be in charge of your royal court.

But Jesus does not let them off that easily. Jesus knows that the road to glory goes through suffering. Jesus knows that the road to the resurrection goes through Calvary.

And so Jesus asks them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

The cup is Jesus' suffering, and His baptism is His death.

Jesus tells His disciples that if they want those positions of glory, they need to suffer and die with them.

Whether or not they truly understand Jesus, James and John confess their willingness to suffer.

Despite what they say here, the disciples all eventually abandon Jesus. They all run away at some point before Jesus' death. And when Jesus returns from the dead, he finds them hiding in fear, afraid that they will meet the same fate.

To be a disciple is to follow Jesus, and it may mean a life of suffering and death. At the very least it means a life of servitude and slavery.

Jesus did not come to be served. Jesus could have demanded service and obedience. Jesus could have turned the people around him into His servants and His slaves. He had every right. But Jesus chose to be a servant. He chose to suffer. He chose to die.

And that is what your life is to be like. Not expecting other people to serve you. Not expecting other people to take care of you and provide for you, but following Jesus' example of loving and serving those around you.

Notice what Jesus said. "Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all." Not slave of some. Not slave of the nice people, or the people who treat you well, or who pay you back. Not even, the slave of the people who appreciate you and thank you for your service.

Because that is the way that Jesus served. Jesus gave His life freely for all people. Not just those who deserved it. Not just the people who were nice to Him. Jesus died for people like James and John who wanted the power and glory for themselves. Jesus died for people like Peter, who would say three times that he didn't even know him. Jesus died for people like Judas, who cared more about money than anything else. Jesus died for people like the chief priests and the scribes who were jealous of his popularity and scandalized by his message. Jesus died for people like the Gentiles, even the Roman soldiers, who were cruel and took pleasure in causing other people pain. Jesus died for people like Pontius Pilate who knew what was right, but was too scared to do it.

In short, Jesus died for you. Even though you care more about your popularity than serving other people. Even though you pretend you don't know Jesus and try to blend in with the crowd. Even though you're greedy, cruel or cowardly.

When you hear the story of Jesus' suffering over the next few weeks, don't say to yourself, "I'm glad I'm not like those people. I'm glad I'm not like those doubting disciples. I'm glad I'm not like those jealous Jews. I'm glad I'm not like those heartless heathen soldiers."

Think to yourself, "Thank God, that Jesus died for all these sinners. That means that there's hope for me, too."

You are one of the many, for whom Jesus gave His life as a ransom. You are one whom Jesus came to serve.

Jesus went to Jerusalem for you. He knew what He would have to go through, and He did it all for you.