October 21, 2018   
Mark 10:35-45   
Through the eyes of a child

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Mark 10:35-45 Common English Bible

James and John, Zebedee’s sons, came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. They said, “Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory.” Jesus replied, “You don’t know what you’re asking! Can you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?” “We can,” they answered. Jesus said, “You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive, but to sit at my right or left hand isn’t mine to give. It belongs to those for whom it has been prepared.” Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with James and John. Jesus called them over and said, “You know that the ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. But that’s not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, for the Human One didn’t come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people.”

My children have a favorite question that they like to corner me with. Who is your favorite? Now, I have two children, one a boy and one girl so my answer is always, “You are my favorite girl child” or “You are my favorite boy child.” I have no idea how you answer that question if you have two girls or two boys or if you have more than two children. My daughter will even say to me, “I know that I am your favorite child. You can tell me. It’s okay.” She tries to trick me!

James and John are having a similar conversation. They want to know who will sit on the right and left of Jesus, and in just a few more chapters there will be people at Jesus’ left and right hanging on the cross as they all die. Are James and John sure that they want to be on Jesus’ right and left? I’m not sure what kind of glory James and John think Jesus will give them.[[1]](#footnote-1) We do that too.

My kids ask me who is the favorite because they want to focus on the glory instead of the suffering. A family is picnics and trips to the fair, but it is also disagreements and chores and learning how to tie your own shoes and wash your clothes. There is good and bad, there is glory and suffering. It reminds me of being a part of this church. It is wonderful and joyful and there is beautiful music and children running all around, but it is also people who can be mean and hurtful. I love how writer Brene Brown says being a part of a church community should be about singing, breaking bread, and passing the peace with people you want to punch in the face.[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is hard for us to talk about suffering because we aren’t good about talking about sad things. Our SMU intern Abbey showed me a video making the rounds on Facebook of a little girl crying. Tears are running down the little girl’s face and her mom asks her if she is crying. “No, I’m laughing.” With tears running down her face, the girl can’t admit that she is sad. She says, “I’m happy.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

We don’t think that it is okay to be sad, even in the church. In Rachel Held Evans book *Inspired*, she says, “Often I hear from readers who left their churches because they had no songs to sing after the miscarriage, the shooting, the earthquake, the divorce, the diagnosis, the attack, the bankruptcy.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Children teach us that it is okay to cry, it is okay to be sad. Sadness can create changed hearts in us as we open ourselves up to the suffering and pain in our world.

The church is a place where we can carry each other’s pain because Christianity is a team sport. We can hold space for one another by sitting with each another in our pain, without judgment or solutions.[[5]](#footnote-5) Suffering invites us to be radically human with one another, reaching across the table, clasping hands, and crying together.[[6]](#footnote-6)

We don’t know the answer to why or how life delivers pain, so we make casseroles and we weep with those who weep. There is nothing too broken that God cannot mend or redeem. Where there is suffering, God is right there. Writer Glennon Doyle says that as parents we want to protect our child from pain and suffering, but it is our job as parents to hold their hands and walk into the pain with them. We show them that they don’t have to avoid the fires of life, because they learn that they are fireproof. We look at our kids and say, “I see your pain- it’s big and it’s real. But I see your courage, too - and it’s bigger and it’s more real. That fire won’t burn you up, You’re fireproof.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Today as we celebrate children in our worship, we might want to focus on the glory and not on the suffering. But, we need to hold hands and walk into the pain and suffering of children in our world. One in 5 children in Dallas lives in poverty.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Children’s Defense Fund reports that being exposed to poverty during childhood has lifelong negative consequences. “It increases the risk for developmental delays, poor school performance, and behavioral issues. Poor children are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be unemployed, earn less as adults, and become involved in the criminal justice system. Poverty also increases children’s risk of hunger, illness, and homelessness.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Such suffering is preventable and needless. It doesn’t have to be this way. We know what to do. We can end child poverty by investing in policies and programs to increase employment for families with children, increase work pay, and ensure children’s basic needs are met.[[10]](#footnote-10)

How can we share the suffering of children in poverty and their parents who struggle every day to make ends meet? How can we share the suffering of children torn from parents’ arms as they sought safety in our land? How can we share the suffering of children and teens who are daily haunted by the threat of gun violence in school or neighborhood? Are we feeling that pain as our own and responding as we would to our own pain? We are called to bring a message to all children who suffer that God knows and shares their pain, God is present with them and will not abandon them even in their most painful times.

One of our church family, Kelly Hart, volunteers as an advocate with CASA. Judges appoint Dallas CASA volunteers to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children, helping these children gain safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible. Last year more than 1,300 volunteers served more than 3,100 children annually in Dallas County.

One of the volunteers with CASA said that people ask her how she can do this work, how she can handle hearing the sad stories and she said what is truly sad to her is people who know about these children and they choose not to do anything. Children are a valuable part of the future and of our community and they deserve the best help we can give them.[[11]](#footnote-11) Kelly Hart received an email this week about a foster child and what this child wants in their family. The child wrote things like I want food and water. Don’t hit me. A house with running water and lights. I want love. I want no drugs. Don't kill my pets. Help with school. Nice clean clothes. No lice. Clean bed with covers. Don't sell my toys. Treated fair. Don't get drunk. Nice house and safe. Coat. Toothbrush. All children deserve a safe, enriched life with love and encouragement.

We work so that all children have lives of hope and not despair. All who care about children know too well that children suffer. God calls us as the body of Christ to serve the last, the least, and the left behind and stand with and for all children who suffer, embodying God’s love and will for justice. God calls us to end the suffering we can affect, and there is enough in our own communities to keep us busy for the rest of our lives.

Following Jesus is about serving others. “Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, for the Human One didn’t come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people.” Jesus comes to give his life to liberate many people. Jesus saves us from the future we think we want, from the glory we misunderstand, from the life we’ve been urged to strive after but ultimately is not abundant life, from viewing companions and competitors and fellow children of God as threats. God came to us as we are and showed us God’s complete acceptance and grace in humanity but we misunderstood it, we fled from it, we were threatened by it, and ultimately we put the Son of God to death.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Three times Jesus tells the disciples what will happen in Jerusalem and three times they misunderstand. Jesus keeps on going. He keeps marching, he keeps healing, he keeps loving, he keeps serving, he keeps giving himself as a ransom to save us from ourselves. God keeps coming for us in love. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2018/10/pentecost-22-b-gospel-irony/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://jenhatmaker.com/episode-02-brene-brown.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.newsflare.com/video/114290/other/toddler-says-she-is-not-crying-as-she-wants-to-be-a-big-girl [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Evans, Rachel Held. Inspired. P. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Evans, Rachel Held. Inspired. P. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hatmaker, Jen. Of Mess and Moxie. P. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.facebook.com/glennondoyle/videos/its-not-our-job-nor-our-right-to-protect-our-kids-from-pain/10155711954439710/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2017/11/14/one-five-dallas-area-children-live-poverty-report-finds [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Sabbath-2018\_CHRISTIAN-FINAL.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Sabbath-2018\_CHRISTIAN-FINAL.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. https://www.dallascasa.org/about-us/about-dallas-casa/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://www.davidlose.net/2018/10/pentecost-22-b-gospel-irony/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)