

The Divine Pecking Order

Mark 10:35-45

The Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

In corporate or company organizations there is a pecking order. This is especially so in businesses which are for profit, although non-profit agencies also have pecking orders. There are people at the top. There are people at the bottom. There are a whole lot of people in between.

The people at the bottom have to do what the people at the top tell them to do. The people at the bottom have to do what the people in between the top and the bottom tell them to do. They are subject to everyone. They are the ones who have to do the menial tasks that no one else wants to do. They have to do the grunt work that makes the company work and grow and they do not get paid very much for doing this. They have to do the boring tasks that do not amount to much. They have to do the custodial or maintenance tasks that everyone else looks down on. They have to do repetitive tasks over and over and over again. The things that they do are not important in and of themselves. They are not making major decisions for the company. They are not getting their name highlighted in some fashion. They punch in. They punch out. They might have joined a union to give them some say against the people at the top, but then the union has a pecking order also. They join the union at the bottom and they have to work their way up to the top.

The people at the top enjoy a life that other people envy. They have a great deal of freedom. They have a great deal of wealth. They make the major decisions for the direction of the company. They are paid to ensure the future of the company and to make sure that its stockholders continue to become wealthy. Every decision that they make affects lives of countless others. Every decision they make is therefore important. People pay attention to them. People pay attention to what they say and what they do. These people are also generally wealthy. Their wealth grants them a great deal of privilege. Their wealth grants them freedom to do many things that the people at the bottom of the pecking order do not have the freedom to do. Their lives are important. With them making decisions that affect the lives of so many other people, their lives are important. They live their life with a feeling that their life is significant.

In between the top and the bottom of the pecking order are a lot of people in between. The closer you get to the bottom of the pecking order the less and less power the people have and the more and more they have to do what the people above them in the pecking order tell them to do. The higher you get in the pecking order the fewer and fewer people you have telling you what to do. Also as you get higher in the pecking order you have more and more people that you are telling them what to do.

That is the way of things among the Gentiles.

Therefore anyone who asks the Lord to sit at His right hand and at His left hand in His glory not only does not understand what His glory is, but also has bought into the notion of the Gentiles and their pecking order.

James and John request a seat at the Lord's right hand and at His left hand when He enters into His glory. Jesus tells them that they have no idea what they were asking. They were asking it according to the pecking order of the world. They imagined that Jesus entered into His glory at the end of time when He returns in great power with the glory of His heavenly Father and all of the holy angels. They imagined that they would be able to sit next to Jesus as He judged the living and the dead. They wanted lives of significance. They wanted lives that had power over the lives of others. They wanted people to look up to them and owe them. They wanted to have some of the glory of the Lord so that they could

make eternal decisions for other people as to whether or not they would get everlasting life. James and John wanted the power to damn people to hell and the power to grant them eternal life. After all they were the ones who asked Jesus for permission to call down fire upon the Samaritan villages who had rejected Him. This is why Jesus called them "the Sons of Thunder." They thought the way that the Gentiles think. They wanted to secure their place in the pecking order. And when the other disciples found out what James and John had done they were indignant. Their indignance simply reveals that they had the same understanding of the glory of Jesus that James and John did. James and John had beaten them to the punch. All along the disciples wanted to secure their life of importance, wealth, and power, and they saw Jesus as the way to accomplish this. They wanted to use Jesus and His glory to advance their own. If they had not believed this, they would not have become indignant. The disciples along with James and John believed in the pecking order of the Gentiles.

Jesus tells them that the only way to sit at His right and His left hand is for them to drink the cup that He is going to drink and for them to be baptized with the baptism with which He is baptized.

At the baptism of Jesus the voice from heaven says about Jesus, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." When the voice says that He is well pleased with Jesus God is saying that His soul delights in Jesus. The voice from heaven is quoting the prophecy of Isaiah. "This is my servant in whom my soul delights. I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations." In Isaiah's prophecies He gives a further description of this servant He says, "We considered Him stricken by God, smitten and afflicted. The punishment that brought us peace was on Him. We all like sheep have gone astray and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

When the voice from heaven at the Baptism of our Lord said to Jesus, "With You I am well pleased," the voice was saying that Jesus was the servant of the Lord about whom Isaiah prophecies. Jesus is the One who is to be stricken by God, smitten by Him and afflicted. The punishment that brings us peace will be on Him. The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

That is the significance of the Baptism of our Lord. That is the Baptism of our Lord. Jesus is asking James and John when they want to sit at His right and at His left in His glory whether or not they can be baptized with His baptism. He asking them whether or not they can die. It is only when Jesus dies that He enters His glory.

Jesus also asks them if they can drink the cup that He is going to drink. The next time that Jesus will mention a cup is in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus is praying on the night of His betrayal He prays to His heavenly Father and says, "Let this cup pass from Me." His terror at the thought of what is going to happen to Him the next day so terrifies Him that He asks to be let out of it. He wants to be let out of His crucifixion and death. When He asks the Father about this He refers to His crucifixion and death as His cup.

James and John may not realize that Jesus is talking about His death when He says, "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink," and they confidently assert that they can. Jesus tells them that they will drink His cup. They will die. James is dead before the book of Acts is completed. John dies many years later as an old man. When they die they have entered with Jesus into His glory.

That means that the crucifixion of Jesus is His glory. It is place where He forgives the whole world of its sins. Think how hard it is to forgive those who sin against you and you will realize that Jesus shows His glory when He forgives everyone who has ever lived, does live, and ever will live of everything that they have done and will do. It is therefore at His crucifixion that He saves everyone from God's righteous wrath and gives them eternal life. The crucifixion of Jesus is the glory of Jesus.

Jesus tells James and John that it is not within His authority to grant them to sit at His right hand and His left hand in His glory. Now remember His glory is His crucifixion. The Father had appointed two criminals to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus when He entered His glory. The Father had not appointed James and John to that position. He had other things for them to do.

If you subscribe to the pecking order of the Gentiles, then you do not understand your Lord. You will never figure out what His baptism is and what His cup is. If you subscribe to the pecking order of the Gentiles you will never understand who is sitting at His right hand and at His left hand when He enters into His glory. If you subscribe to the pecking order of Jesus, you will never know what true glory is and you will miss out on it.

The pecking order of Jesus is exactly the opposite of the pecking order of the Gentiles. The more other people tell you what to do the higher you are in the pecking order of Jesus. The more you wind up doing for others and serving others in menial tasks the higher in the pecking order of Jesus you are. The less and less important your life is to the Gentiles, the higher you are in the pecking order of Jesus you are.

This is why our Lord rates children so high in the Kingdom of God. Children have to do what everyone tells them to do. They have to do what their parents tell them to do. They have to do what their elders tell them to do. They have to do what people at church tell them to do. They have to do what their teachers at school tell them to do. They have to obey all of these people and serve them because they do not know much by their own experience. If they do not obey all of these people, harm will come to them.

That means that in our Lord's pecking order it is possible to spot the most important person in the organizational structure. He makes it obvious who is first of all. That means that in the Church's organizational structure there is a person who is first of all. There is only one person in the Church who is first of all. Anyone else would be second or third. The way that you spot the one in the Church who is first of all is to look for the one who is slave of all.

In the Church the one who serves absolutely everyone else in the structure and everyone else benefits from His labor and has lives of significance and importance because of His behavior, He is the one who is first of all.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.