

“What Do You Want Me to Do for You?” Part I of 2

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Blue Jean Sunday – Outdoor Worship Service in our Decatur Toy Park
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, October 21, 2018
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Mark 10: 35-45 (NRSV)

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹ They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The Good Place

Arnold Glasow said, *“Some folks make you feel at home.
Others make you wish you were.”*

Welcome home.

No kidding; we mean it.

Welcome home.

We truly want you to feel and know that you are welcome here,
that this park and church and world

is your home whether for one Sunday morning of hope
or for a lifetime of service, fun, and tons more hope.

O'er yonder is our red swing set.

That red swing set is in motion every day, all day, 365 days a year,
and has been swinging and laughing since around 2,000.
Those swings should be listed in the Guinness Book of World Records.

This park has positively served
to change the shape and sounds of our fair city.
Home values and family values are both up and evident.
The fact that several hundred folks are here every week, week in and week out,
has drawn new businesses and helped make this area vibrant and alive.

This playground begat Dancing Goats, Watersheds, Marley House, and Fleet Feet.
This park has changed the shape of the city and increased the width of smiles.
This park is a delightful, visible, tangible manifestation of radical hospitality.

On a family vacation to Alaska,
at the base of Mt. Denali my wife Betty got to visiting with someone.
Found out she was also from Atlanta. *Small world.*
Found out she brought her grandchildren to play in Decatur...to this park.

The other day I welcomed some families to this playground and a woman said,
"Oh, I'm not from around here."
"Where are you from?" I asked, imagining Cleveland or Chicago.
She said, *"Atlanta Station."*
Well, whether you travel six miles or six blocks or six houses to be here,
everybody is welcome.

How many playgrounds do you know that have so many affectionate nicknames?
Decatur Toy Park -- Toddler Park -- The Land of Misfit Toys

Some very young people may call it *mine*.
Radical hospitality is evident when we bring our children
to this sacred space and safe place:
their behavior testifies it's not "mine" but rather "ours".

Consider the toys.
Here we have a living model of hospitality in action.
From Little Tykes to little trucks to little cabins in the woods,
every toy in the park is a gift of love,
a loving example of sharing unconditionally,
of giving without any strings attached.

Every toy you see is given unconditionally, without strings attached.
Toys are shared in community, for the greater good.
Broken toys are removed and recycled, some to be playthings for chimps at the CDC.

We see here radical hospitality

as the ME grows to see the WE, the Community.
We see here radical hospitality
as the US grows to see the THEM, the whole people of God.
We see here radical hospitality
as tribes become less important,
because respecting and recognizing one takes precedence.
This is a good place.

The Good Place

Our scriptures for today speak to us of a yearning for a good place.

James and John, sons of Zebedee, approach Jesus, their rabbi, teacher, healer.
"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."
He said to them, *"What is it you want me to do for you?"*
"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."
Jesus said, *"You do not know what you are asking."*

The Spirit has a way of getting to the heart of the matter,
to the heart of what matters to you and to me and to us.
Christ in this passage figures out exactly
what James and John, sons of Zebedee, want God to do for them.
They want assurance.
Assurance of admission.
Assurance of admission to the Good Place,
an absolute promise and guarantee that they will get into heaven.
What better way to be assured of an eternal reward
than to get Jesus to promise
to promote them to sit one on his right side, the other on the left?!

Now, Jesus' question to them is priceless.
What do you want me to do for you?
What do you want God to do for you?
A healing of an aching body or an ailing relationship?
The restoration of your life or love, your faith or family, your city or country?
A renewed sense of purpose? Less fear? More hope?
Assurance of the promise of life everlasting?

Everything is on the Table.
James and John, sons of Zebedee,
maybe feeling a bit anxious or curious or insecure, go for it.
Promise us now, right now, here and now, that we'll be with you in the Good Place.

Jesus said, *"You do not know what you are asking."*

Don't worry or be anxious or afraid
about what might or might not happen in the by-and-by.
Who sits on the right side or the left of God in heaven is not Christ's to determine.

Right now, Jesus points out to James and John, sons of Zebedee,
right now make your priority bringing heaven down to earth,
bringing love to bear in all things and in all ways;
bringing holy relationships into every home and hovel and hamlet.

God is here, now, with you, up close and personal,
washing feet, building relationships, showing how to love in God's name.

Focus on creating every place you go and touch and can reach
to be a Good Place, a Safe Space, a Sacred State of Being.

Drink from the Cup that Christ drinks from;
be baptized with the same baptism.
With this baptism you are ordained to the ministry, to a vocation of caring,
called and commissioned to serve God and one another.
With this baptism you will wash feet, release fears, restore lives.
With this baptism you will be empowered to offer service above self.

When you drink from this Cup, commit yourself to God.
When you drink from this Cup, become yoked with the Church, the Body of Christ.
When you drink from this Cup, partake and participate in radical hospitality.

"What do you want me to do for you?" asks Jesus.
Ask for whatever you want or must or seek.
Know this.

The Lord provides meaning and purpose in life;
a mission of service above self;
the capacity to love and learn and listen.

Follow God and see how the Holy Spirit puts the icing on the cake.
You are not alone.
You get a team, partners, compadres in the cause,
a diverse, multi-talented, wildly assorted team of folks that seem to not fit,
drawn together by a spirit of radical hospitality to
transform and restore what once was fragmented into a good
place.

The Good Place

Daughter Katie has got me watching a tv show called, you guessed it, The Good Place.

Eleanor, Chidi, Jason, Tahani, and Simone are at a going away party.
To celebrate Tahini's engagement,
they surround a sheet cake decorated with a photo of these best friends.
Suddenly Eleanor has a meltdown.
She doesn't want her team, her tribe, her only friends to break up.
She explodes with an outburst of anger directed right at her best friends,
friends she suddenly insists she never wanted, anyway.
Eleanor grabs a chunk of cake with her hands, scooping out the image of her face,
and rushes outside for a cab.

After a while Simone walks outside.
Simone sees [Eleanor] hiding among the bushes, fists still full of cake.

"You're a brain scientist," Eleanor says to Simone.
"Can you tell me why I did that in there?"

"Sorry. I don't specialize in temper tantrums," says Simone.
Then she relents and says, "Here's my guess.
As humans evolved the first big problem we had to overcome was me vs. us,
learning to sacrifice a little individual freedom
for the benefit of a group.
Like sharing food and resources so we don't starve or get eaten by tigers
--things like that.

The next problem to overcome was us vs. them.
Trying to see other groups different from ours as equal.
That one we're still struggling with.
That's why we still have racism and nationalism,
and why fans of Stone Cold Steve Austin hate fans of The Rock.
What's interesting about you
is that I don't think you ever got past the me vs. us stage.
Have you ever been part of a group that you really cared about?"
[Den of Geek Website, By: Alec Bojalad, Oct 11, 2018]

The closer we get to overcoming us verses them,
the closer we find ourselves in **the Good Place**

One of the joys of being an eight-day-a-week church
is there's no dull moments, always something going on,
we are most always open,
and we are most always affirming, life giving, permission giving.

Last Sunday a number of our church folk represented at the Gay Pride events.

Stahr is an active church member in her first year of college.
She was delighted by the Pride parade
yet appalled at the so-called Christians
holding signs that spewed hate against homosexuals.

You know, I wonder what would happen if everyone's bathroom mirror said,
"I really only love God as much as the person I love the least." –Dorothy Day

She posted her response.

*"Love is a terrible thing to hate.
This has been on my heart a lot recently,
so I thought the day of the Atlanta pride parade would be a good time to share.
The Lord I love and the Lord I serve does not know hate.
1 John 4:7-8 states "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God;
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."
Whoever does not love does not know God!!!
The hate you spout on street corners is wildly outdated.
You are not preaching from the gospel
--you are preaching from a heart without God.
Verse 20 states "Those who say, "I love God,"
and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars;
for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen,
cannot love God whom they have not seen."
If you can read Leviticus 18:22,
you can read 1 John 4:20, Romans 5:8, Mark 12:31, Colossians 3:14 and so on.
Fellow Christians, I plead that in this season of pride and diversity,
you spread the LOVE.
GOD IS LOVE.
I'll stand up for what I believe in.
And I believe in love."
--Stahr Stembell, Member, First Christian Church of Decatur*

Do you think she's in a Good Place?

Welcome home.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!