

# A sermon preached by the Rev. Jeanne Leinbach

at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights, Ohio on October 17, 2021

*Isaiah 53:4-12; Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45*

The disciples' declaration to Jesus this morning is somewhat amusing: "We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you!"

Jesus points out that they do not understand what they are asking. They want to sit on either side of Jesus in his glory. Yet, Jesus's glory will come only after great suffering, his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion. Are they able to participate in his suffering? Are they able to drink the cup, meaning the blood Jesus will shed, or be baptized with his baptism, an Old Testament reference to waters overwhelming the sufferer: from Psalm 69 (verse 3), "I have come into deep waters, and the torrent washes over me."

When the disciples reply that they are able to participate in this suffering...which is worthy of another sermon....Jesus says, "Even so, 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." Not his to grant, which brings us back to the wanting. The disciples **want** to sit on either side of Jesus in his glory. What does Scripture tell us about wanting?" In just a few chapters later in the Gospel of Mark (14:36), Jesus will be in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion. He says, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me." He continues, "Yet, not what I want, but what you want." Not what I want, but what God wants.

We need to let go...let go and let God. God alone is God. It's so hard for us to let go. Our cultural context is all about control, about shaping our own destiny: we want to live how we want to live; how we work, how we play. It's hard to see sometimes, how that control we crave can push God to the margins. It seems contradictory that letting go is the path to achievement. Yet, it is only in letting go that we experience the fullness of life.

What we all know to be true is that letting go is not easy. In part, the difficulty comes from not recognizing the restlessness within ourselves, and so we work harder to control our lives as influenced by our culture. Think about commercials that tell us what soda to drink, what food to eat, what clothes to wear, what shows to watch, what phone to buy. Our culture shapes how we live our lives. Our acquisitions and our accomplishments appease our restlessness, but do not resolve our restlessness. St. Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

Our restlessness is our conduit, our pathway to God. Our restlessness is innate within us to help us find our way home, our place of perfect peace, our place of unity with God. We sang a beautiful hymn (689) a few weeks ago with this message. Hear the words once again: "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me; it was not I that found, O Savior true; no I was found of thee." Our restlessness is God seeking us. God is giving us the path to follow, the impulse to seek, to find our way to the peace that surpasses all understanding, the peace that sustains us through heartache, the peace that inspires our perspectives and decision-making, the peace that illuminates gratitude and joy. The peace that opens our heart to both the gravity and gift of community.

Jesus was not born on silk sheets in a palace, but on hay in a manger. In the final days before his death, Jesus did not enter Jerusalem on a warhorse, adorned in armor, regaled with banners, surrounded by guardsmen, but on a donkey, dressed in a robe, honored with palms, surrounded by fishermen and every day folk. Jesus' reign is not about the conquering hero. His reign is all about compassion for the sick and brokenhearted, for the oppressed and marginalized. Our seeking leads us to the peace that opens our heart to the both the gravity and the gift of community, of caring for one another individually and as a society.

For 175 years, St. Paul's has not only been a church, it's been a community – a community where together, its members have worshiped, prayed, explored their faith, educated next generations, served those in need, and loved one another. Our seeking brings us here. We all know how hard it is to keep our hearts open to God's prompting – we get distracted by cultural messaging. Yet, God never leaves us, and St. Paul's stands ready, reaching out and inviting in, offering worship, formation, outreach, pastoral care and fellowship, so that together, we are strengthened and renewed to seek, serve, and love.

Today, we begin our Stewardship Campaign for the 2022 calendar year. In the coming weeks, you will hear from fellow parishioners on why and how they determine their financial pledge to St. Paul's. You will receive postcards in the mail highlighting our various ministries. In early November, you will receive a brochure and a pledge card in the mail. The timing of these Stewardship activities is deliberate. I am asking that before you complete your pledge card for 2022, you listen to our Stewardship messaging and give time to reflecting on the role of St. Paul's in your life. You all are involved in many good causes and you appreciate the role of various institutions in your life – perhaps the arts or education or social services. But, giving to the church is unique for two reasons. First, our only funding source is our parishioners. We don't receive funding from alumnae around the country or patrons all around Northeast Ohio. Our funding is from you. Second, and most importantly, our faith is life itself. Please spend time over the next few weeks reflecting on your pledge. I recommend calculating what percentage of your income – you choose pre-tax or post-tax – what percentage you are giving to the church. In determining my own giving, this data point is helpful. Please know that I am deeply grateful for your gifts which fund the ministries of this parish and deeply grateful to be on this journey with you. Amen.