

If you follow college basketball at all you know that every year around the middle of March the tournament brackets are released. A favorite pastime for some is trying to predict the winners. If you've filled out a bracket this year you may already have realized predicting is hard. Even after the first two rounds many brackets are ruined. By the time tomorrow's championship game rolls around you probably have thrown your bracket away like me because of how many you got wrong.

Making predictions about the future isn't easy. If it was the weather person would never be wrong. But mistakes are almost a guarantee. The disciples found that out as they were living and learning from Jesus. He said things about the future, but they either completely missed it or they simply didn't get it. They were confused about power and glory especially. They thought those were Jesus' future. But their prediction was wrong. If you're thinking the same way, thinking that being a follower of Jesus always means power and glory, then your predictions will be wrong too.

The end for Jesus was getting closer, maybe only a couple weeks away. He knew exactly what would happen and when. But the disciples didn't. So in the gospel this morning to give them some assurances and comfort and to prepare them for what they would encounter...

**Jesus makes his final predictions**  
**He predicts his own life**  
**He predicts his disciples' lives**

Not knowing the date of your death or any details actually keeps you calm about it. People with fatal diseases who are aware that death is coming soon act differently. They stop doing anything unnecessary. They try and get in last minute experiences. They might take chances, live irresponsibly, or forget to care about others. Imagine if Jesus had acted that way. Instead of turning towards Jerusalem to face the suffering and death he would've gone the other way on a Mediterranean cruise. Or maybe he would have spent time alone with his friends in the hills away from the crowds and soldiers hiding from those trying to arrest him. Except that's not what he did. **"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed,"** he told his disciples. He wouldn't run from the situation.

By this Jesus turned human ideas of greatness upside down. Noble doesn't adequately describe what Jesus did. He didn't just walk with purpose to a gruesome death like some convicted death row inmate trying to act tough in an impossible situation. Jesus knew they would torture him, mock him, and ultimately crucify him. He wasn't looking for the disciples to come up with an escape plan. He wasn't looking for them to fight or find alternate places to go other than Jerusalem. He didn't have to because this is why he came, to serve not to be served.

It all seems like too much for us. He knew he would suffer and die and still he was going straight into it. We want nothing to do with suffering or death. We spend our days just trying to avoid suffering. Suffering is for the weak, sacrifice is for those who don't have alternatives. We don't have to suffer or sacrifice. We're certainly not ready to die. The weather is just getting warm. The summer is coming with vacations, parties, and friends. New adventures, new schools, and we've got a bright future. We understand we have to die, just not today. I'm living for me today.

Jesus was willing to go to Jerusalem. No one forced him. And once there he paid a price we can scarcely imagine and could never afford. God demanded from us one perfect life. We don't have one to offer. That is until Jesus paid with his life, giving his life for ours. And that's not all. Jesus came back. **"On the third day he will be raised to life!"** A statement so bold and so amazing like that we might miss it. Jesus' life was all about his death. But it was more about his resurrection. Death for Jesus only lasted a time. He rose. His resurrection proves God accepted the payment. So when we see Jesus alive we know our sins are paid for.

I can't say that I've attended a lot of county and state fairs in my life. But the times that I have I can't remember once seeing a fortune teller. Maybe they're at the circus. But imagine sitting down to hear your fortune, which is a waste of money by the way, and the fortune teller looks into the crystal ball and starts to speak. "I will have success in my investments. I will find love, get married, and have children." "Great" you say, "that all sounds good." But she wasn't predicting your future, she was predicting hers. You'd ask for your money back. Jesus predicted his own future. The disciples needed to hear it. But they may have been thinking, what about us, what's our future look like? Jesus used a situation that arose to predict the disciples' lives too.

Do you relate to the mother of Zebedee's sons? Do you think you would've acted like she did, asking such a bold question? Honestly I wouldn't. I'm not that forceful to simply go to someone with a request that bold. Other people are like that. They're the kind of people that know what they want and they don't have any trouble going after it. But it's not saying she was wrong or that someone who wouldn't have asked is right. Jesus doesn't rebuke her for asking something wrong. **"Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit on your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."** Sometimes people expected so little of Jesus that they didn't ask him for anything. Here someone expects so much of Jesus, a glorious kingdom, a throne on which to rule, that she asks too much.

She seems to have completely missed the previous prediction of Jesus' life and how it applied to her two sons and their lives. Her sons and she were still thinking about power. What awesome positions they would have sitting and ruling next to Jesus. They believed in him as the Savior and they were bold to say that in the new kingdom they would like to help serve him. They wanted to devote themselves completely to service to Christ. Positions on his right and left would only help them do that.

A natural instinct to want the top spot is what drives many people. It comes with power, prestige, and honor. Whether it's striving to be captain of the team or taking the next step up the management chain we usually want something more than we have. Ambition isn't wrong. It's the attitude behind the ambition and the action used to carry out ambition that can be wrong. Selfish ambition that only sees self is sinful. Stopping at absolutely nothing to achieve goals can be sinful. Being jealous of those who have power and position is sinful. We can be self serving and self seeking just like the disciples might have been.

These disciples needed to know their future was tied to Jesus' future. **"You don't know what you are asking. You will indeed drink from my cup."** They would be closer to him than they imagined, just in suffering and persecution, not glory and power. Selfish ambition is done away with in Christ's kingdom. Jesus destroys selfish ambition by dying a selfless death. Luther states what Jesus did best when he says in his explanation to the second article of the Apostles Creed, **"purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death."** Christ gave up everything selflessly so that I might have everything, life, perfection, and forgiveness.

Ambition in Christ's kingdom doesn't look for rewards from people, it just serves. **"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."** Jesus' prediction for our lives is that they'll be ones of service. Paul predicted the same thing in his letter to the Romans, **"Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."** We're free in Christ. Having a relationship with Jesus means we're saved by him, and we do what he did. Knowing forgiveness means knowing sacrifice. We'll do things the king wants simply because he wants us to do them. We won't hold our status as forgiven saints over anybody, but rather share with them the good news so they can share with us that status. And we will drink the cup Jesus drank, suffering if that's what it takes. We will find greatness in selflessly serving.

Some predictions are nearly impossible. Only two people in one online pool for the NCAA brackets got all four of the final four teams right. Two out of 5.9 million predictions. Jesus made his final predictions perfect. He knew exactly what would happen to him as he went to Jerusalem to suffer and die for our sins. And he knew exactly what that would mean for us as we go out to serve. Followers of Jesus drink his cup and find greatness in selflessly serving. Our motivation and model is Christ Jesus our Savior who came not to be served but to serve as a ransom for many.