

Theme Party
“Communion is in service.”
John 13:31b-35
A Dramatic Portrayal of James, son of Zebedee

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First United Methodist Church of Royal Oak, Michigan

Son of Thunder

The one who has the greatest anger is the one who thinks most of himself.

There was reason for my brother and me to be given the names, *Sons of Thunder*. For both of us went thundering after whatever we could do for ourselves. Who would be considered the head of the family once our father, Zebedee had receded from life? Who would be the most attractive one, to win the confidence of a father to give the most attractive woman's hand in marriage? Who would hold the largest share of a family business? Who would be considered the greatest?

I tell you, Jacob and Esau held nothing over us when it came to brotherly competition. And just as Esau wailed after Jacob's cunning to gain the upper hand, so we, each of us, thundered when we thought ourselves cheated by each other or any who would cross us.

Anger can be great, when a man believes he might be deprived of something he's supposed to have. So, though Mary, our mother, said, "James you must silence this roar of yours," I would only become the more enraged, thundering all the more.

It is true. I know: the one who has the greatest anger is the one who thinks most of himself.

Quieting the Thunder

John and I were called out from our nets. After all, neither of us was much inclined to live lives without homes or business. There was nothing in such a life we would have found attractive. What would there have been that would have been to our profit?

We were in from the sea, late in the morning. The boats were beached on the shore and we were at work cleaning the nets after a productive day of casting. Our father

looked on, drying the sails and inspecting the boats, that the cedar and oak planks be kept well-sealed with pitch.

I did not notice him at first. A curious man: he simply walked forward on the beach watching our work and, looking closely at our nets, he began to roll the tiny knots we had fashioned between his fingers. His teeth revealed in a broad smile made a contrast with his skin made bronze as ours by the sun. We might have believed he fished, like us, but a wood chip set atop his ear labeled him *carpenter*. “Fine nets well tied and kept could draw in many fish,” he said. “But come along,” he said, “follow me.”

And just like that, with his *follow me*, we left. I remember Zebedee standing in the boat watching us. He never said a word.

We did not choose him, you see. When he said it sometime later we already knew what he meant. The matter was: *he chose us*.

Then, as closely as he had watched us at work with our nets, we watched him. We saw how he could work through crowds, casting his attention not on multitudes but on people, as if he were reaching and teaching and caring for each, one-by-one, as if each were the only one to know. His compassion was beyond understanding.

He could go for hours, for days, without a thought for a comfortable mat on which to sleep or more than a handful of bread to eat. Though he could laugh hard and feast with the best of the land, he took at least as much joy to mix with the least and tell them they made a difference. And this cost him. He exposed himself to their illnesses. He lost ritual purity more often than he retained it by the extent of his care as he touched those who were unclean by the nature of their illness or extent of their sin.

He made like their healing was more important than his status. I wondered at times if he were the opposite of John and me.

While we still thundered for the sake of ourselves, he quieted the storms and brought shalom: the true, strong peace that makes things the way they ought to be.

The difference was never greater than this day of Passover. His power had grown so large. The people were coming to him by the thousands. The throngs that heralded him and us, who followed him through the gates of the City were all but declaring him *King*. The time, we could tell, was upon us. God’s time for the Messiah to reign was breaking forth like the sun rising above the Galilean hills to cast its rays upon the lake.

Now, at last, is the end of the Roman domination. Now, at last, is the vindication of Israel and for Zion to be the center where all the rest come for instruction. Now is the time for the strong arm of God to rule through his Messiah. And now was to be the time for us to rule it with him.

Yet, which one of us would be the greatest in his Kingdom? Which one of us should sit at his right hand? Which one of us was to take second place, still above the rest, yet second place to the first? Would it be John? Or would it be me?

I tell you, our thunder roared.

Then, heated, and unashamedly obvious to all the others, we took it to him. "Which one of us will it be," we asked, "to sit at your right hand and which at your left?" Then he cast his eyes on us, studying us with stern pity, yet love. His silence already told us we would not hear what we had come to hear. We didn't know for a moment whether his words would be words of rebuke or dismissal, like the "Get behind me, Satan!" we heard him give Simon Peter before.

Then, silence was broken when he said, "Are you willing to drink the cup from which I drink or be baptized with the baptism by which I am baptized?" How could we know what he meant? "We can," we simply replied.

Then he told us he couldn't say who would be first and who second, but only that we would indeed share his cup and baptism. That was when the rest, whom we had overlooked in the course of our own thundering, began to grumble and curse us for counting them out.

Thundering After Him

"Enough!" he said. We could not know how weary and hard-pressed he was. Yet he taught us, "You know how the rulers of this world expect others to serve them and how they lord it over others." (*Thunder*, I thought). He went on, "It will not be so among you. If you want to be great, serve others. And the greatest among you will be servant to all."

And that was it. Except, he took a towel and a basin, got down on his knees along the stone of the floor, and taking the role of the servant he came to each of us and washed the soil of the day off our feet.

The Master...took the form of the servant.

The Master...served those who followed him.

The Master...silenced the thunder.

And gave us peace.