
TOO BIG FOR YOUR BRITCHES

James and John want to be on top.

- They want to sit on either side of JESUS in HIS glory.

The other ten disciples are angry about this.

- They're looking at James and John and saying, "You arrogant, selfish, and presumptuous sons of Zebedee. Who do you think you are?"

It sounds like James and John are pretty full of themselves.

- Their egos are inflated and they are living with an exaggerated sense of their own importance.
- They want to sit in glory and be great.
 - But, who among us doesn't want that?

Don't you want to be great too?

- Don't you want to be great in your life, work, and the things you do:
 - great in your friendships, marriage, and parenting;
 - great in your community and among your peers;
 - great in your faith and prayer?
- Don't you want to be great in the eyes of GOD, in the eyes of others, and in your own eyes?
- Don't you want to sit in the glory of greatness so you never again have to worry or wonder if you are enough?

Most of us have been told we're not supposed to want that.

- And yet, haven't there been times in your life when you got too big for your britches?
- That seems to be what's going on with James and John.
 - They've gotten too big for their britches.
 - They're all broth and no beans.
 - All high and mighty.
 - They think the sun comes up just to hear them crow.
 - They are too big for their britches.
 - But maybe that's not such a bad thing.

What are you really looking for in those times when you get too big for your britches?

- Maybe it's attention, recognition, approval, applause.
- Maybe it's power or control.
- Maybe that's how you deal with your fear or hide your insecurity and self-doubt.
 - It might be those things, but perhaps it's more than that.

Maybe what James and John want, what you and I want, is really about wanting to be something.

- When we get too big for our britches, don't we really just want to be something more than what we have been?
- Maybe the problem isn't that James and John have gotten too big for their britches.
 - Maybe they just need bigger britches.
 - What if they've outgrown their current life and identity and are trying to connect to a more significant, more whole, more complete life and identity?
 - Maybe that's what's going on with us, too, when we've gotten too big for our britches.

Have you ever wanted to be like someone else?

- Who was it, and what attracted you to them?
- What qualities did they have that you wanted for yourself?

- Maybe it was a teacher or mentor, a family member or friend, a colleague or boss, an author, a hero, or maybe someone who seemed to have it all together.
- Probably, it was someone who was their own person.
- There was a wholeness about them.
- They were grounded in daily life but not stuck in it.
- They lived large, but they weren't full of themselves.
- They were deeply centered in themselves but always had space for you in their lives.

We all have people like that in our lives.

- They attract and draw us to them.
- Their lives speak to us of love and friendship.
- They show us something about ourselves.
- They help us to see new possibilities.
- Their presence changes who we are.
- They call from us the best part of who we are.
- In them, we glimpse something sacred and sacramental, meaningful and life-giving.
 - They show us the possibility of being something.
 - And we want to get as close to them as we can.
 - Whatever they've got, we want some for ourselves.

What if that is what led James and John to say to JESUS, "Grant us to sit, one at YOUR right hand and one at YOUR left, in YOUR glory?"

- It's a bold request. But is it wrong?
 - What if we're all intended for greatness and glory?
- Didn't JESUS say to the disciples, "The one who believes in ME will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these"?
 - Might that not be true for you and me as well?

Perhaps James and John are right in what they seek but mistaken in how they seek it.

- Maybe they need to realize that glory and greatness are not about all the ways we "lord it over" another:
 - power, rank, position, prestige, reputation, beauty, accomplishments, skills.
- Maybe glory and greatness are not something we are given, but something we are transformed into.
- Maybe they are not something we have but something we become.

JESUS doesn't say "No" to James and John.

- HE doesn't dismiss or judge their request.
- He doesn't ridicule or belittle them.

Instead, HE says, "You do not know what you are asking."

- You might hear that as a criticism, but what if it's a warning?
 - What if JESUS ensures they understand where this path will take them and what it will ask of them?
- HE doesn't deny that greatness and glory can be theirs.
 - Instead, HE tells them what greatness and glory look like.
 - And it doesn't look like what most of us have been told they do.
 - It doesn't look like what usually gets recognized and rewarded.
 - It doesn't look like the things most of us strive for.
 - It looks like a cup and a baptism.

That cup is the cup of self-surrender, the cup of Gethsemane.

- It's a choice between the desire for power and the pursuit of meaning, purpose, and life.
 - It's listening for a call in our lives that is more than simply choosing individual preferences.
 - It's setting aside a smaller and known quantity of life for a larger and unknown quantity.
 - It's making the well-being of another equal to our own well-being.
 - It's letting go of an exaggerated sense of our own importance and being more authentic.
 - It's giving up the need to prove myself because I finally realize that I don't have anything to prove, and neither do you.
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That baptism means allowing ourselves to be immersed in a life that is larger and beyond ourselves.

- It's living in a world of reversals in which the first shall be last, the last shall be first, and the great ones serve and care for others.
 - It means being connected to a life source and energy that is more than we can generate for ourselves.
 - It happens when we love our neighbor and our enemy as ourselves.
 - It means turning the other cheek, being peacemakers, hungering and thirsting for justice, and offering forgiveness.
 - It's letting the waters of compassion flow as we reach out and care for "the least of these" or offer welcome to the stranger.
 - It's respecting the dignity of every human being.
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This cup and baptism are about losing something of ourselves.

- And what if that's really how we get bigger britches?

Let me explain.

- When I get too big for my britches, I have a choice.
 - I can get a larger size or lose some of myself.
 - Either way, the britches are bigger.
 - With the first, however, nothing has changed,
 - but with the second, everything has changed.
 - I have changed.
 - My life is different, and that has the power to change my relationships and world.
 - So, which will it be for you?

Are you able to drink the cup of surrender and drown in the waters of baptism?

- That's JESUS' question to James, John, and us today.
 - James and John answer, "We are able,"
- Yes, they are, and so are you and I.
 - We are all able. But are we willing?

What is the cup in your life today?

- And how much are you willing to drink?
- What is the baptism awaiting you today?
 - And how deep into those waters are you willing to dive?
- How committed are you to looking outward at others rather than just at your own desire for greatness?
 - You are able to drink from that cup.
 - But how much are you willing to drink?

Amen.