

Pentecost 20B  
Mark 10:35-45  
18 October 2009  
Christ Church

**Dr. Jack Biles was David's mentor in college. He was Vice Chairman of the English Department and a brilliant scholar. Dr. Biles expected much from his students. The more capable the student, the more he expected. He would exercise his wit upon those who tried to impress him with their insight or learning. His reputation as a tough professor caused some people to avoid his classes. But those who truly had a thirst for learning took every class that he taught.**

**Like David's father, Dr. Biles was born in the Grant Park area of Atlanta in 1920. Also like David's dad, he was stationed in England during World War II. He served as Adjutant to a colonel in the U. S. Army.**

**On the night of June 5, 1944, the call came for Operation Overlord – and believe it or not, the colonel was AWOL:**

**somewhere in London, drunk. Dr. Biles was told that he would lead the battalion onto Omaha Beach.**

**In the pre-dawn darkness of June 6, the men dropped into the icy Atlantic out of their landing crafts and splashed or swam to the shoreline. Dr. Biles had been told to keep the men on the edge of the water until the MPs made contact with them. The beach was heavily mined, and the MPs would guide the men safely through.**

**Dr. Biles was none too pleased when the MPs didn't show up. The enemy fire was so heavy that the MPs were all crouched in hastily dug foxholes. Dr. Biles' battalion had no place to hide from the constant hail of bullets hurtling toward them. So, he did something that was expressly forbidden: He turned on his flashlight.**

**MPs appeared like magic. Immediately, they began showing the men how to crawl to wind their way through the land mines. Dr. Biles didn't much care about the dressing-**

**down that he got after this incident. He was a very strong man.**

**David was Dr. Biles' graduate teaching assistant – a true adventure. Dr. Biles suffered no fools, and many of his students were afraid of him. But David got to know him well. Once, he drove out to Dr. Biles' home to bring him the latest chapter of his thesis. Dr. Biles instructed him to pick up a six pack of beer on the way. Dr. Biles put the beer on ice and read the thesis while David climbed up on the house and patched a leak in the roof.**

**It was about this time that David and I started dating. When we became engaged, Dr. Biles and Edith, his wife, invited us to dinner. That first evening together was the beginning of a deep, long-standing friendship, one that has made a lasting impression on my life. Early on, this formidable but gentle man told me not to call him “Dr. Biles.” I called him “Poppa B.”**

Only seven years from the time we met, Pop B became ill and died. David and I were crushed. He was a second father to both of us and we felt the loss acutely. Seldom a day goes by that we don't recall one of his more memorable sayings: satiric, funny, and impossible to dispute.

I had learned early in the relationship never to express an opinion without having done the research to back up whatever claim I wished to make. As a result, I mostly listened in those conversations, which was a good thing.

Not long after Pop B died, I had a vivid dream about him. In the dream I was, of all things, ironing clothes while talking to him in his living room. As I was giving him an update on the family, I noticed that he was drinking something from a chalice. Its aroma permeated the room, and I could see the frothy head with steamy clouds ascending from it.

I said, "Pop B, what is in that chalice? It smells *divine*. Could I taste it?" He smiled at me – a loving smile – and then

**he gave me a serious look. “You are not yet ready to drink of this,” he told me.**

**I thought of this dream as I read today’s Gospel. When James and John approach Jesus, they ask him to give them a place of privilege in the Kingdom of God. Jesus replies with a question: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?”**

**PHEME PERKINS, a New Testament scholar, notes that drinking from the cup is one of the principal metaphors Jesus uses to explain how we can participate in His life. The cup that Jesus drinks is his blood poured out for all humanity. It is the cup of suffering; it is the cup of his Passion. When he asks the disciples, “Are you ready to drink the cup that I drink?” he is really asking them if they are prepared to suffer as he suffers.**

**At this point in their journey, the disciples don’t really know what they’re asking – or what Jesus is asking of them. They can’t see what’s ahead, as Jesus does. In the bond of love they feel for Jesus, they are burning with the desire to follow**

**wherever he goes and be with him always. They do not realize the cost.**

**And isn't that true of us as well? We want God when we want God – maybe for this hour on Sunday morning, or in the middle of a crisis when we have no where else to turn. But to follow Christ means something so much more. It means to give ourselves over to a Life in Him every day.**

**It means reading the Sacred Word out of our thirst for Him. It means giving ourselves to a life of prayer and a life of service. It means letting go of false values. It means working to ease the burden of the poor and those who live in the midst of injustice and violence. It means giving generously of what we have, knowing that the resources we manage are not ours, but God's. All this is part of what it means to drink the cup.**

**In its early history, the Catholic Church upheld saints, particular individuals who drank of the cup of suffering through martyrdom: men and women who, rather than deny**

**Christ in order to worship the Emperor, went into the arena to be eaten by wild beasts.**

**But there are many other kinds of saints, not necessarily those who die in such dramatic and vivid ways. There are saints that quietly give their lives over to Christ and remain unnoticed by most people.**

**A few days ago, David and I went to a meeting at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Atlanta. Whenever I see the Polaris room atop the Regency, I think of my niece who, with her family, visited us in Atlanta every year for spring break. As a little girl, Shea would always beg to go to the hotel and ride the glass elevator up to the “Blue Bubble,” as she called it. I always wondered what her First Grade teacher thought when Shea reported she had hung out in a cocktail lounge over Spring break.**

**Shea is now a lovely young woman. On her wedding day, beaming with love and joy, she did not know that she would one day bear a son with autism. I have seen Shea grow from**

**lively innocence to dogged determination; she is doing whatever it takes to help her son adapt and grow into a strong man.**

**It is not an easy life for Shea. She might have just as easily withdrawn from the challenges of raising an autistic child; she could have retreated into any number of things to distract her from this reality. Instead, she has embraced Christ as her companion on this journey. And she has found the fortitude and commitment to stay the course and make the best possible life for her son. I wish that the Church upheld more folks who are doing such deeds as this.**

**At some point along the way, God requires our lives of us. We don't necessarily know when, or where, or how. In the words of the old Methodist hymn, "though by the path He leads us, but one step we may see..."**

**As the Gospel teaches, we must reconcile ourselves to the truth that following Christ will eventually lead to discomfort, and perhaps suffering. It may cost us monetary advantage.**

**But along with the cost comes grace. In the struggle to live in Christ, we also know His joy. We experience deep meaning in our lives; we find true purpose; we know what it means to love richly and genuinely.**

**Toward the end of my dream about Pop B, he was standing at the doorway that leads to the garage. I could tell that he was about to leave me. I said to him, “Pop B, please don’t go yet; I have so much to ask you.” But he continued to close the door. Just before it was completely closed, I asked one last question: “What must I do to get where you are?”**

**I won’t quote his reply, but I will paraphrase it. He told me I had to work my backside off.**

**How may we, along with James and John, become great in Christ’s Kingdom? To be great, we must work and serve. “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life...”**