

Good day dear friends and family of False Bay flock,

Reading: Mark 10:35-45 and Hebrews 4:16 Hymn: *The Lord's my Shepherd*

In our church calendar we have the option of observing the Feast of **St John** today instead of on 27 December. While things are looking bleak regarding the Covid 19 pandemic and we are bracing ourselves that the worst is yet to come, the good news is that we anticipate that by 27 December we would have weathered the storm and life would have returned to a new normal.

I am therefore inviting us to make a little study of **St John, Apostle and Evangelist**. **John** was the disciple whom Jesus **loved**, the one who was seated next to him (John 13:23). He was from Galilee; his father Zebedee was a fisherman, and his mother, Salome, one of the ladies who were at the service of Jesus. John and his brother, **James the Great**, were both **fishermen and disciples of John the Baptist** who pointed out Jesus to them as *"The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"*. With Andrew, they **followed** Jesus. A few months later when John and James were helping their father with his fishing nets, Jesus called them, and they left their father in the boat with the hired men and went with Jesus. When they requested for the highest rank in the kingdom, Jesus asked them if they were ready to drink his cup, that is to suffer martyrdom. (Mark 10:35-41). The other disciples are **indignant** with the two brothers, probably not because **James and John** have missed Jesus' message but because they beat the others in requesting the **honorable** spots!

In response Jesus uses two powerful symbols. He asks if James and John can drink the **cup** that he will drink and whether they can be **baptized** with the baptism he will undergo. In the Scriptures, "**cup**" is frequently used as a metaphor for **suffering**. That meaning is **clear** in the Gethsemane scene where Jesus begs God to let the **cup** pass him by if possible. Likewise, baptism here signifies being plunged into suffering and going through the throes of death, to emerge into **new life**.

Let us pause for a moment as we hear this reading in the context of the global pandemic that we are experiencing. How often, at a Baptism service, Confirmation service, Ordination service, lay ministers licensing, admission of parish councils, marriage ceremonies, commissioning services, do we answer questions and respond with "**I do**" or "**we do**" or "**with God's help I will**"? In our **eagerness**, do we **reflect** on our own **ability** to be **united** with Christ in his death? Perhaps there have been times when we have made these **commitments** without fully realizing the **demands** of **dedicating** ourselves to Jesus way of **costly love**.

During this lockdown, Jesus is taking us another step **deeper**. Jesus is asking us today what is our **motivation** in serving others? There is no guarantee of a reward. The only **throne** that Jesus shares with his disciples is the "**throne of grace**". Here, one receives **not** places of honour alongside Jesus but **mercy, grace, and timely help** (Heb 4:16). The **wellspring** for this **mercy** is that Jesus has himself endured all that we endure and is thus able to suffer with all those who suffer.

Jesus attempts to teach James and John and the other disciples: the only **adequate** response to suffering is to turn towards **the Merciful One**, in whom we place our trust. This is not an explanation for how a merciful God can allow **innocent people** to suffer, but it is the response of faith. As we immerse ourselves in God's mercy, we are baptized in a love that is stronger than suffering and death.

Let me stop here for now and God willing, continue with this reading tomorrow.

Please reach out to any person who worships at St John's or bears the name of John. Also to any member of the Church Men's Society,

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, Have mercy. Nkosi, yiba nenceba. Krestu, yiba nenceba. Nkosi, yiba nenceba. Here, wees genadig. Christus, wees genadig. Here, wees genadig.

I am, because we are, because God I . Opening hearts to heal God's world. *God's mercies are new every morning.*