

**October 17, 2021**

**29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Is 53:10-11**

**Heb 4:14-16**

**Mk 10:35-45**

I hail from Capernaum in Galilee. Together with my two sons I own and operate a manufacturing business. From basalt stone, which is plentiful in the area surrounding Capernaum, we make grinding stones used in milling machines for processing various grains and used in olive presses to make olive oil. Located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum is strategically located on the main trading route that runs between Egypt and Babylon. Our business has grown exponentially because we can easily export our products to other destinations along this trade route known as the Via Maris.

Capernaum is a wonderful place to live and work. I love being on the shore of the lake. It's a beautiful view and we always have fresh fish to eat. Our town is even prosperous enough to support our own synagogue.

There is one blight in the neighborhood, however. There is a garrison of Roman soldiers stationed here. I hate the Romans. They never miss an opportunity to remind us that we are an occupied country with them in charge. I would happily convert my factory into weapons manufacturing if I could escape the notice of the Romans. I would make more than enough weapons to arm a force capable of driving the Romans out of here so we could re-establish a monarchy with a king like David. But, alas, right now that is nothing more than a dream. So, I'll keep making grinding stones.

Despite our success with grinding stones, I'm always looking for new business opportunities. Some time ago a talented carpenter from Nazareth named Jesus moved into town. I approached him with an idea. I thought that we could perhaps partner and together not only make grinding stones, but vertically integrate into making complete milling machines and olive presses. I know the market to be huge.

Jesus was friendly—one might even say engaging, charming, and charismatic—all anyone could want in a business partner. But He showed little interest in my proposal. I soon figured out why.

Jesus began teaching and preaching in and around Galilee. His message is of a new world order. He calls it the Kingdom of God. In the midst of His teaching and preaching, Jesus also performs many signs and miraculous healings. He even raised my neighbor Jairus' daughter from the dead! Even more impressive than the miracles is this man's capacity to love. Just to look Him in the eye is a life-altering experience.

Is He a prophet sent to us by God in our time of need? He often refers to Himself as the Son of Man. What does that mean? Four hundred years ago the priest Ezra prophesied about a unique person of extraordinary spiritual endowments through whom God's everlasting kingdom will be established. Ezra called Him the Son of Man. Is this the guy? Dare I say it—could this Jesus be the long-awaited Messiah? Is He the one to deliver us from the Romans and reinstate the monarchy? Is He destined to become our King—a king like David? I hear He comes from David's lineage.

Along with many others, I began to follow Jesus around Galilee. He seems to have a core group of twelve trusted companions, but there are many more of us following Him around, and the entourage grows daily. Jesus and His core group of 12 seem like a pretty close-knit bunch.

Recently Jesus announced that He was leaving Galilee to take His ministry to Jerusalem, the seat of power for all of Israel. Is this the Messiah on the march? I had to be sure, so I decided to leave the business in the hands of my sons and follow Jesus to Jerusalem. That was some days ago.

I'm up very early this morning. I couldn't sleep at all last night as we camped on the approach to Jericho. We will soon reach Jerusalem. But there were some troubling events that happened yesterday that kept me awake most of the night.

There was some discord among Jesus' inner circle of 12 yesterday—a surprising and disconcerting occurrence. The rumor running through all of us disciples is that Jesus will somehow be coming into His glory when we reach Jerusalem. We don't know exactly what that means, but it raises our hopes that we are all headed for some sort of messianic destiny. But yesterday's conflict arose because two of the 12, James and John, asked Jesus to appoint them His top 2 lieutenants as if they are somehow superior to the other 10. Of course, the 10 were outraged. Jesus calmed the situation when He gathered the 12 and explained to them that leadership in the coming new world order will be servant leadership and that He Himself is here to serve and not to be served.

But then Jesus said something shocking. He said that He was going to give His life as a ransom for many. What does that mean? Does He expect to become a martyr for some cause like Israel's cause for independence? If He dies and is not to be the King of the new Kingdom of Israel, who will lead? One of the 12? Someone else? Or is this cause doomed to failure as previous such causes have failed?

Earlier in our journey toward Jerusalem, I recall overhearing Jesus tell His inner circle: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and hand Him over to the Gentiles who will mock Him, spit upon Him, scourge Him, and put Him to death...."

Why would the chief priests want to kill the King of Israel? Why would they sell Jesus out to the Romans?

And then Jesus said something else shocking and incredible. In fact, it's unbelievable to me. He said that after 3 days the Son of Man will rise after having been put to death. Does that mean there will be an uprising if He is indeed killed? Surely, He doesn't mean that He Himself will rise from the dead like He raised my neighbor's daughter from the dead? Only God can do that.

My head hurts, my heart aches, and my faith is shaken. You ever feel that way? I need to understand stuff before I place my faith in anything. Isn't that the way of us humans? Right now, I understand nothing about this man or His mission.

I don't know whether to continue on to Jerusalem or return home. Maybe I should approach Jesus and pitch my business venture to Him once again.

Wait a minute. Here He comes now. He seems to be looking for someone. His eyes meet mine and He locks in His gaze on me. I can't look away. I'm transfixed. I've never felt anything like this before. There is nothing but pure love beaming from His eyes into mine. I can feel His love and His presence in the depth of my being. All during the time I have been following Jesus I have been trying to think through and rationalize all that I have heard and seen—just like any good businessman would do. But now with His eyes Jesus is speaking directly to my heart. And just as quickly as He approached, Jesus moves on.

It's decision time for me. After that loving encounter, I have no choice but to continue on to Jerusalem. I have no idea what awaits. I don't know whether I am all in or partially in or just confused. I don't really know what I'm being called to do or what I'm being drawn toward. But I do know one thing. If I separate myself from Jesus; if I let Him walk out of my life, there will be a huge void impossible to fill. I also know that I can't get enough of Him. The more I am around Him the more I want to be around Him. I need to make His journey my journey, no questions asked. I feel like every day that I continue on with Jesus forces me to die to some things of this world—even to things within myself. I don't know how long I can allow that to continue. Yet the more that happens, the greater joy I feel. I've never felt more joyful. For now, maybe I'll just take it day-by-day and see where the journey leads me.

May the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob grant me the grace and courage to keep following Jesus.