

Ambition

In 1976 motivational speaker Steve Chandler interviewed an aspiring young actor named Arnold Swarzenegger. Swarzenegger was promoting his first film. “Now that you have retired from bodybuilding,” Chandler asked him, “what are you going to do next?” With a calm voice, Arnold Swarzenegger said, “I’m going to be the No. 1 box office star in all of Hollywood.”

Chandler said he tried not to show his amusement. Swarzenegger’s first attempt at movies hadn’t shown much promise, and his Austrian accent and monstrous build didn’t suggest instant acceptance by audiences. “It’s the same process I used in bodybuilding.” Schwarzenegger went on to explain. “What you do is create a vision of who you want to be, and then live into the picture, as if it were already true.”

We all have our dreams. Some dreams are very unrealistic and some are childish, but dreams give us something to think about none the less. James and John in our gospel lesson today had dreams and they had ambition. These two young men were

successful fishermen when Jesus first called them to be disciples. As two of Jesus' closest disciples, they were present with Jesus at some pretty significant times in his ministry. Jesus wanted them to be with him on the mountain at the Transfiguration and in Gethsemane. How they must have impressed him for Jesus to give them the nicknames: "sons of thunder". With a nickname like that, James and John must have been leaders who could make things happen. So when the two brothers came to Jesus expressing their ambition to be on the right and the left of him in heaven, it should not have been a surprise. They said "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

Now as parents when our children say, "Mom or Dad, I need you to do me a favor" we become cautious. The children don't tell us right away what it is they want. They expect the wish to be granted because you are their parent and you will do whatever they want. This is the kind of relationship that James and John felt they had with Jesus. They felt they have earned special consideration and privileges.

Sometimes you and I go to God with the same kind of attitude, don't we? We're Christians. We're Sunday school teachers. We give generously to the church's work. We deserve to have God to listen to our requests and to grant them even though God may have a different plan altogether. "Teacher," James and John said, "We want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." Jesus realizes that John and James don't exactly know what they are asking. They will have to go through the same fate that is awaiting Jesus. Jesus tells them they will have to be baptized and drink from the cup. To John and James who are young and think themselves invincible, say they can do anything. Jesus tells them they can drink the cup and be baptized but they cannot sit on his right or left. These positions have already been prepared for others. Jesus tells John and James they will experience what he experiences, the suffering, betrayal, and they will give up their lives in the service of God. However, sitting on the right and left

side of Jesus is not possible. James and John were ambitious, they wanted greatness, and they thought they had earned it.

I've always considered myself an ambitious person. Growing up in a family of ten children, we all had to work together and help one another. Working hard was the everyday occurrences I carried into my adulthood. When both of my children were in school, my ambition took me back to work and higher education. While working full time, raising a family, and running a household, I earned a Business Degree in University. Just when I thought that would be enough studying and working, God called me to ministry. It was this renewed ambition and the path God set out for me, which brought me here today to Lincoln Road United Church.

Jesus did not condemn James and John for their ambition however misguided they became. Jesus cautions all of us, as well as John and James against the dangers of turning ambition into dishonor, ruthlessness, or greed. God gave us healthy minds and healthy bodies to avoid these pitfalls. God wants us to use our

ambitions for good things. Turning these ambitions into ways we can serve the Lord is the greatest gift we can give to God and to ourselves.

“What you do is create a vision of who you want to be, and then live into the picture, as if it were already true” Arnold Schwarzenegger’s advice is something we can all take. How do you picture yourself in God’s great Creation? How strong are your ambitions to serve God and others? What is your vision of who you want to be?