

“Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left” (Mk 10:37). Have you ever been asked to take a place of honor? I am reminded of my days in the military. In 1988, I was newly assigned to Fort Sill, Oklahoma and my introduction to the Commanding Officer took place at a seat of honor at the Officer’s Club for the Battalion Dining In. And the first words out of Colonel Barker’s mouth were: “Who the heck do you think you are?” Like a deer struck in the eyes by headlights, I was dumbstruck. I had no answer to give.

James and John must have been equally taken aback. They ask for a seat of honor and Jesus promises blood sweat and tears, but no place of honor. Before the glory is the cross, before the honor is sacrifice, before one can enjoy the fruit of a life well lived, there is suffering, pain, and death.

The Prophet Isaiah paints a picture of this sacrifice and suffering when he tells us: “The LORD was pleased to crush him in infirmity” (53:10). The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:16-17).

How do we combat evil in our world? In the cold war era of nuclear proliferation, the answer was mutually assured destruction. Fire one nuclear weapon and we will respond with ten. And if they fire ten, we fire a hundred. As both sides annihilate each other, everyone on the planet suffers. In an age of terrorism, our battles are very different. We suspect everyone as a potential threat. We trust no one. We live in fear. We fight from afar and countless soldiers and civilians suffer ... but there is no peace. There is no resolution. There is no end to the cycle of violence.

God combats evil quite differently. One sacrifices for the good of all. “Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear” (Is 53:11).

Jesus invites us to share in his mission. He asks us to take a seat of honor through sacrifice and service:

- “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:14-15).
- “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:12-13).

How do we combat evil in our world? Another way is to shine a light in the darkness. A couple of years ago, I went to the FYNDout Free Pregnancy Center to bless a new ultrasound machine donated by the Knights of Columbus. The center serves women, men and families in the Tanana Valley with a holistic approach to pregnancy and parenting. This faith-based organization looks to Jesus for how to serve others. Jesus loved ALL regardless of where they were at in life.

The pregnancy center staff shared stories of helping women in crisis to choose life. They shine a light in the womb and offer a silent prayer. Hearts and minds change. I know I was in a medical office, but it felt more like a chapel. It was sacred space. I felt like I had a seat of honor in a place of glory as I blessed the new ultrasound machine and the staff that serve there. At Fort Sill, I was dumbstruck. At FYNDOut Free I was awestruck. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Some 8 to 10 years ago, I had the chance to reconnect with Colonel Barker and saw him face to face for the first time in over 2 decades. He had retired from the military and gone to work for the Veteran's Administration, but he was on the cusp of a second retirement. Naturally, our conversation turned to faith. With the demands of his military career and the heavy workload of the VA, he had not really found time to consistently honor the sabbath nor to connect with a faith community. I believe our gentle conversation lit a candle for him. In retirement, he is living out his baptismal calling, actively involved in a Baptist Church and giving of his time, talent, and treasure to support the church and build up the body of Christ.

“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help” (Heb 4:15-16)