

*35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

*41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

She sent him off to school with the instructions, "Don't get your clothes dirty." So he spent a day concerned about just that. During writing he set his mind on making sure his sleeve never came into contact with the heavy black marks his pencil was making, he watched to see that the pencil lead never brushed against the front of his shirt. In art, the paint was his enemy, in every moment a threat to the unspotted, unstained clothing he was wearing. At recess he stayed away from everyone else, away from the dust and the dirty hands of his classmates. At lunch he barely tasted the food as he carefully guided it from his plate to his mouth.

The end of the day came, he returned home in clothes as fresh and unwrinkled as they had been in the mornings light.

Would you call his day a success? A triumph? Not if you were his teacher, or a friend. He missed out on everything important as he set his attention on what matters not at all.

God sent his Son into the world. He was in every respect tested as we are yet without sin. That is what the scriptures say, Jesus was in every respect tested as we are, yet without sin. How shall we think of this?

My first inclination is to put Jesus into the story of the little boy. God sent him off into the world with the instructions, "Don't get your purity soiled."

So Jesus came into the world dressed in perfection - clothed in sinlessness. His task for his day in this world was not to muss up his clothes.

He set his heart and mind on doing everything right. He was careful of the company he kept so that he would never hear a dirty joke, or laugh at one. He kept his distance from women, especially the wrong sort of women, so that touching would not lead to thoughts of something more.

He spent most of his time alone with God, praying, praising. Never did he discuss religion or politics for to do so might bring argument or disagreement.

And when his day on earth was done, he returned to his Father who was pleased and greeted him with the words, "You never got dirty, Jesus, good for you."

Ridiculous!

Whatever Jesus perfection was it was not that kind of perfection. Not a keeping himself unstained by the world.

No, Jesus got down in the dirt. His enemies labeled him a glutton and a drunkard. Eating with tax collectors and sinners was his practice - in their homes, on their turf. Jesus was not stuffy and sanctimonious but a real person among real people. His friend Simon, the Pharisee was upset when a woman who was a sinner was crying at Jesus feet, kissing his feet, wiping his feet with her hair. And Jesus let her, and did not pull back.

The crowds gathered around Jesus because he touched them and healed them. Even those with contagious disease, leprosy which God's law said you should not touch, Jesus touched. For Jesus perfection was not something to be preserved or guarded, but was created in his living and loving - created in his trusting in God and in his serving.

His disciples were interested in glory and honor. They were coveting the places of highest authority, a place at Jesus right and left hand. But they were confused about God and Jesus, glory and honor. Jesus taught them with these words, "*You know that among the nations those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

God's will for Jesus and for those who belong to Jesus is to be involved with life. To serve, to give of their lives for others. This is God's perfection - not clean clothes, but a bloody cross - stripped naked because he gave his life as a ransom for many.

Our thinking about Jesus can become such a barrier to our living out the life God intends for us. If we think of his perfection as a remaining unstained, then we think that to follow him is to distance ourselves from people who might stain us. If we think that sin is primarily not doing something wrong, then we will use the church as a fortress to protect us from wrong. But if we see Jesus as our Lord who plunged into the center of life, loving, giving, serving, then his perfection in this will lead us to our neighbor - to the hungry, to the homeless, to those that are sick or in prison. We will give our lives as he gave his to bring hope to a world in despair.

The young boy with whom I began has attended every school. But with his teacher's help, his mother's help, his classmates' help sometimes he learns to get his clothes dirty, and to love and learn.

Most every church is full of people like you and I who have thought of Jesus' being without sin as if he was keeping his clothes clean. And who have thought that God wanted that same sort of perfection from us.

But with God's help, and one another's help, we can begin to serve. We can join our Lord out among the briars and the brambles, seeking the lost sheep. We can offer our few loaves and fish for the hungry that all people might be fed. We can learn little by little how to love, and to give by doing just that more and more each day.

For the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Thanks be to God.