

*17While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, 18“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; 19then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.”*

*20Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. 21And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” 22But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” 23He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” 24When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. 25But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 26It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, 27and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; 28just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

I remember setting up dominos. In the days before they made those sets with ten dominos attached to a plastic strip that could be set up with a movement of the wrist, I remember setting up dominos, one by one. Slowly, carefully, each in exactly the right place. Then with a touch the chain reaction was started, domino fell into domino until none were left standing.

Sometimes I feel like I'm a domino in a vast array - one domino standing tall. Secure, safe, or so it seems. Until suddenly the sound of domino clicking against domino is growing louder. And there's nothing I can do to stop it.

A company buys a company and dominos fall.

Someone runs a red light and dominos fall.

A marriage partner falls out of love, a friend dies, mental illness claims a child and dominos fall. Is God the one making them fall, making me fall? Is there some reason, some purpose, some meaning, some good? Or am I nothing more than a domino set up in a long chain, simply destined to fall?

“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes and they will condemn him to death, then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, and flogged and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised.”

Once they went up to Jerusalem the rest would be - the being handed over, the being condemned, the being mocked, and flogged and crucified and being raised.

By going to Jerusalem Jesus was putting himself into a row of dominos. But after that others would be the ones in control. Others would be handing him over, and mocking and flogging and crucifying and even another, his heavenly Father, would be the one who would do the raising of Jesus. Once he went to Jerusalem he was giving up power over his life.

Will God be in all of this? If I lose my job, if my son must fight in a war, if illness confines me to my home, will God be in all of this?

Is God the one who sets up the dominos? Or fate? Or Satan? Or am I myself somehow responsible?

Were the scribes and the Pharisees setting up the dominos of Jesus' crucifixion? The greed of CEOs and stockholders causing jobs to be lost?

Only one answer matters. Will God be there when I have been knocked down to set me up once more? If the Father will be there to raise the Son on the third day, then the mocking and flogging and crucifying, and all their pain and humiliation can be borne.

Look around. If you know the stories of people here you will know that not only Jesus was lifted up again, but that so many of us have been set on our feet once more after life knocked us down. God will be in our lives, and in all our deaths, to give us life once more.

And now he invites us: Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus invites you to live as he did. Servant of others, slave of others. In love for you, Jesus went to Jerusalem. He gave his life as a ransom for you. He was knocked down to the deepest pit so that he might continually be lifting you up into life. And now he invites you to live as he did. Not seeking the highest place as James and John did, but seeking to give the greatest service, giving your days and your deeds for others.

Jesus giving himself for you was his path to life. You, being slaves and servants of those who have nothing to give you in return, is your opportunity to be like him.

Here, Christ will strengthen you for this service. He feeds you with himself. He gives you himself that you might live his life already.

Come servants, slaves, all who have been knocked down, all you who belong to Christ. Come, receive your Lord. Amen.