

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost – October 25, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Mark 10:35-45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." 36) "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37) They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." 38) "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39) "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "**You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,** 40) but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." 41) When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42) Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44) and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45) **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

Fellow Disciples of our Lord;

Be the best you can be! Strive for the gold. "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." Slogans like this are used to encourage students, athletes, and workers to rise to the top – to be number one. All too those slogans lead people to become puffed up and filled with pride and selfishness. The "I'm number one mentality" was alive and well among Jesus disciples but ...

Theme: Jesus Laid Down his Life for Us

1. May we gladly suffer for him (for our sins of selfishness)
2. May we gladly serve one another (for our sins of pride)

Just a short time before the events of this text Jesus had carefully explained what the future held for him. He spoke of his betrayal, and being handed over to the governing authorities who would mistreat him and put him to death. He said that in three days he would rise again.

Shortly thereafter, James and John the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with the request. James and John were regarded as being two of the Lord's "favorite" disciples. They had shared some special experiences with Jesus including being with him at his transfiguration. This may help us understand their request. "**We want you to do whatever we ask.**" What's your first reaction to that request?

I'll tell you mine. I think it was selfish, manipulative, and childish. It reminds me of a child trying to con their parents into giving them something. When a child says, "Promise me you'll say, 'Yes'" they are trying to obligate the parent into doing something before they have a chance to think it through carefully.

Another thought that comes to mind is that this request seems like a strange way of approaching Jesus who taught us to pray, "Your will be done" not give me what I want! The humble prayer of the leper seeking Jesus mercy stands in sharp contrast to the request of James and John. **A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."** (Matthew 8:2 NIV) And speaking of contrasts, the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane comes to mind: "**My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.**" (Matthew 26:39 NIV)

With that prayer, Jesus expressed his willingness to suffer for sins of selfishness like James and John expressed in their request. That's good for us because the "*I want it all and I want it now complaint*" isn't a stranger to our thoughts. Sadly, our prayers may not always be the most humble or even in agreement with the Lord's will.

It's amazing to me that Jesus so often and so frequently seemingly ignored the obvious selfishness and immaturity of his disciples just as he does in our text for today. Jesus simply asked what it was that they wanted. Then, after he heard their request; he pointed out the impossible nature of their request.

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39) "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40) but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

Jesus had just told them that his path to glory involved suffering and even death. He's going back to that thought when he asked them if they could drink the cup (or endure the suffering) which he would experience and if they could be baptized in death as he would be. How hasty James and John were in their response. If it meant that they could sit at his right and his left – well surely, they would be willing to make the sacrifice, to do whatever it would take since in their mind – receiving their goal was the “only thing.”

You will suffer, you will die for my sake; Jesus told James and John. But only his death would lead to a throne because He alone will lay down his life for the sins of the world. Moreover, as far as those places of honor – those would go to whomever the Father had selected for those places.

What is it that we take away from this conversation? Our attention has been directed to the concept of suffering – especially the suffering and death of our Lord who laid down his life as the payment for our sins so that we might enjoy life with him. We may be called upon to suffer for his sake. John suffered imprisonment and exile on the island of Patmos for the sake of Christ. Wicked King Herod killed James with the sword. (Cf. Acts 12:1-2)

Our life too may be filled with suffering – perhaps we will even be called upon to suffer directly for the sake of Christ and for our Christian beliefs. But, considering him who suffered for us and understanding the outcome of his sufferings and ours will make us willing to suffer and even lay down our life for Christ. Let us **fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)

Jesus willingly suffered because he knew that the outcome of his suffering would be a joyful rescue and an eternal inheritance for us in his kingdom. Through faith in Jesus, the outcome of our suffering will be life in his kingdom. With his strength we are encouraged to remain true to the faith even when it means that **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,"** (Acts 14:22 NIV)

Jesus laid down his life for our sins of selfishness. May we gladly suffer for him.

Let us suffer here with Jesus, To his image e'er conform;
Heaven's glory soon will please us, Sunshine follow on the storm.
Though we sow in tears of sorrow, We shall reap in heav'nly joy,
And the fears that now annoy Shall be laughter on the morrow.
Christ, I suffer here with thee; There, oh, share thy joy with me. (CW 452, 2)

Jesus laid down his life for our sins of pride. May we gladly serve one another.

We've spent a bit of time analyzing the request that James and John brought to Jesus along with his response to their request. Now let's direct our attention to the reaction of the other disciples as it is reported to us in our text. **When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.**

In their pride, the ten reacted in anger against James and John. One gets the impression from the comments that Jesus shared with them that their anger was not only the result of sinful pride (we're glad we didn't do what you did) but also the result of their own selfish desires. The ten wanted to make themselves look good by pointing the finger at two who had the audacity to ask for something they secretly wanted for themselves. Maybe they were even hoping to score a few brownie points by giving James and John the "lecture" that Jesus didn't deliver. Maybe they were thinking some of the very same thoughts we thought about the selfishness and immaturity of the two. And, maybe you and I are guilty at times of the same sinful pride they expressed with their indignant reaction. We tell our children or grandchildren it's not good to point fingers but at the same time we like to pat ourselves on the backs that we didn't raise our kids to be like the kid who caused our family member to point fingers. It's easy for us to get upset and angry at the sins of others while trying to make excuses for our own.

It's much easier for us to think about being served than being a servant. So what does Jesus have to say to us?

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44) and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

We can easily understand what Jesus is talking about; when he talks of rulers lording it over the people and high officials exercising authority over the people. That's just the way it is in society, people in high places have all the advantages and they use them for their own good – not for the good of others. "Not so with you!" Jesus says.

The Lord's disciples are different, because we have been given a different spirit. When the Holy Spirit called us to faith he changed our minds about living only for self and gave us a spirit of love and compassion along with a willingness to give of ourselves for the sake of others.

You might recall another occasion when the disciples were arguing over who would be the greatest. Jesus took a little child said to them, **"Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."** (Luke 9:48)

Humble service can be as simple as welcoming a little child in Jesus name. We humbly serve others when we speak not of our selves but of Christ Jesus our Savior.

Christ Jesus is the very Son of God and yet he became a man to be our Savior. He humbled himself to serve us and others. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in order that he could place himself under God's law. He humbled himself as he got down on his hands and knees and washed his disciples' feet. He suffered the agony of hell as he hung on the cross with our sins laid upon him. He gave his life as a ransom for all, that all might be saved. Therefore let us die to sin and live with him!

Once again, it is only through the wonderful working of the Holy Spirit that we enjoy this new life. The apostle Paul reminds us of the meaning of Christ's sacrifice.

We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3) Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4) We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5) For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6) For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- 7) because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. 8) Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. (Romans 6:2-8)

Because we have been set free from sin when we were baptized into Christ we are no longer under the control of sin. Therefore, we can by God's power say no to ungodliness as Titus 2 reminds us: **For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12) It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13) while we wait for the blessed hope--the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)**

Let us also die with Jesus. His death from the second death,
From our soul's destruction, frees us, Quickens us with life's glad breath.
Let us mortify, while living, Flesh and blood and die to sin,
And the grave that shuts us in Shall but prove the gate to heaven.
Jesus, here I die to thee, There to live eternally.

Let us gladly live with Jesus; Since he's risen from the dead,
Death and grave must soon release us. Jesus, thou art now our head.
We are truly thine own members; Where thou livest, there live we.
Take and own us constantly, Faithful Friend, as thy dear brethren.
Jesus, here I live to thee, Also there eternally. (CW 452, vss. 3-4)

Amen.