

Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 26, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 20:17 - 28 (NIV)

Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, 18) "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19) and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" 20) Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 21) "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." 22) "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. 23) Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, 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 by my Father." 24) When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25) Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27) and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- 28) **just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

Did you know that: Jean Paul Getty put pay phones in his guest's bedrooms to save money on phone bills? Leonardo da Vinci wrote backwards in his notebooks so that nobody could read them? Tchaikovsky the famous composer was afraid his head might fall off so sometimes he held his head with his right hand while he conducted with his left? Pablo Picasso never threw anything away, not even empty cereal boxes? Agatha Christie wrote a book that actually saved someone's life? These and other fascinating facts make up the biographies in a series of books for young readers, entitled *What A Life!* This three-book series takes a fresh approach to making reading both pleasurable and motivating!

Our gospel lesson for today won't be found in that series of books – but non-the-less our text explains some rather interesting facts about Jesus and the promises he has given us. These facts might lead us to exclaim: What a life! That's what we'll say after examining 1) Jesus' life for us. And that's what we'll say after examining 2) Our Life with Jesus.

Jesus and his disciples were headed to Jerusalem when Jesus took the 12 aside for a private conversation to share some important information about his life with them. Information which ultimately would lead him to be able to discuss their life with him. The paragraph heading which the editors of the NIV translation used to describe this text is *Jesus again predicts his death*. But there's really more to this section of Scripture than that. Death is the end of life – but what Jesus is talking about is the beginning of life our life with him. We can look forward to this life only because of the life he lived for us.

As we listen again to Jesus' words we'll be lead to marvel at the life which he lived for us. Jesus concluded our text by saying: **the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

There are two aspects to the humble life of service that Jesus lived for us. 1) He served us by living a life that we could not even have dreamed of. He lived a life which perfectly followed his heavenly Father's will. 2) He offered his perfect life as the payment which set us free from the guilt and punishment of our sins.

Sometimes when we look back in history we tend to try to romanticize things a bit. We think of Abe Lincoln and the log cabin he grew up in – but we don't usually think of the difficulties associated with that life. It's hard for us to imagine how hard it must have been to live without electricity and gas heat unless we've experienced it for ourselves. It's even harder for us to imagine what life must have been like for Christ. We try to imagine his humility as we sing – *Away in a manger no crib for a bed...the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay* – but how is it possible for us to understand what it was like for God himself to become one of us?

Each time Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man – he's reminding us that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He's reminding us that **he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!**

And it's equally hard for us to imagine what it was like for Christ to live a perfect life for us. You see, unlike Jesus, you and I were conceived and born in sin – without the ability or even the desire to follow our heavenly Father's will. The only reason you and I have that desire now is because Jesus secured peace with God for us. His love for us prompts our love for God. (1 John 4:9-10 NIV) **This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10) This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.**

There's no escaping it! Every time we think and talk about Jesus' perfect life which he lived for us we end up talking about how he also gave up his life for us. And that's what Jesus is talking about in our text too. **"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19) and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"**

Once again it's hard for us to begin to imagine what it must have like to willingly and knowingly head to Jerusalem to be mocked, flogged and crucified. Perhaps many of you have seen *The Passion of Christ*. One of the criticisms I've heard about this movie is that it was so gory and violent – but the director was only trying to picture for us the brutality of the human suffering that Jesus endured as he was sentenced to death and crucified.

I certainly would not want to downplay the significance of that suffering – a suffering we can't begin to imagine – but the fact of the matter is that Jesus' physical suffering didn't accomplish anything for us. Other men suffered in just the same way. The suffering that accomplished our salvation took place while Jesus was on the cross as he cried out – **my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** To be forsaken by God means to experience the agony of hell. Because Jesus suffered that agony for us – we won't ever have to know what that suffering is like. Once again, it's impossible for us to imagine what it must have been like for Jesus to suffer the eternal punishment for the sins of all people as he hung on the cross.

What a life! A life of humble service to the end – lived and offered for us. Acting as the representative of the entire human race, he submitted himself to the demands of God's holy law and he kept them all perfectly in thought, word, and deed. Although he himself was without sin, he endured the wrath of God against sin-- dying in the place of all.

Jesus describes his death as coming at the hands of both Jewish and Gentile leaders – at the hands of God's people and godless people. Their actions reflect the natural hatred of all human beings for the Lord and his Anointed One. There we see the natural hatred which was in our hearts before Christ removed it. May we never forget that our sins made it necessary for Jesus to live the life he lived and die the death he died. You see to some extent it is only in discovering how much we hated God by nature that we can truly begin to know the greatness of God's love for us. The apostle Paul once tried to put that love into perspective for us when he wrote (Romans 5:6-8 NIV) **You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7) Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone**

might possibly dare to die. 8) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

But Jesus' life didn't end with his burial. Although Jesus' disciples either didn't remember or understand or believe it – Jesus not only talked about his suffering and death which he would endure in Jerusalem. He also talked about his glorious resurrection. **On the third day he will be raised to life!"** Ah! What a life! Having completed his mission of living a perfect life and offering it as a payment for the sins of the world, Jesus now began a life of glory. (Philippians 2:9 NIV) **Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...**

The apostle John describes this life of glory for us in (Revelation 7:9-10 NIV) **After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10) And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."**

What a life! That's what we're compelled to say as we think about all that Jesus did for us. That's what we're compelled to say when we think of the glory that Christ enjoys. And that's what we're compelled to say as we consider our life with Jesus.

Jesus perfect life for us stands in sharp contrast to our imperfect selfish lives. We get a glimpse into our selfish natures as we consider the question that Salome, the mother of James and John brought to Jesus.

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 21) "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

Jesus had just spoken of the price he would pay. Her thoughts were all about the privilege and profit her sons might enjoy from his payment. What's in it for me? Isn't that the question we often ask as we approach the tasks of our lives? We're not all that different from the mother of James and John – as loving parents or grandparents we want good things for our children or grandchildren – but often we don't truly understand what is best for us or for them. Sadly we often make foolish requests of God too.

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. 23) Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, 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 by my Father."

The cup that Jesus was going to drink was the cup of suffering poured for him by his heavenly father – we've talked about that cup as we spoke about his suffering and death and his resurrection. Amazingly James and John say that they can drink from this cup.

It's obvious that the son's of Zebedee and their mother didn't quite understand the true nature of Jesus' kingdom. What Jesus has just told them appears to have gone right over their heads or through one ear and out the other. Or perhaps they were looking beyond the suffering and were hoping to be given places of honor by Jesus who was soon to become a King.

Although their request was motivated in part by their own desire for honor and glory, their ambition wasn't completely selfish. They did want to serve the Lord. And that perhaps explains why Jesus didn't rebuke them more harshly.

Without even realizing what they were saying James and John both agreed that they could drink from his cup -- **“You will indeed drink from my cup,** Jesus told them. Surely they would not drink to the same depths that Jesus did and their drinking would not earn them any merit before God – but they would suffer for Christ’s sake.

James and John and the rest of the disciples needed to learn an important lesson about the kingdom of God. We need to learn that very same lesson. Like James and John and the rest of the disciples we have a hard time shedding our sinful ways and thinking. We’re eager for glory and honor – Jesus eagerly humbled himself.

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25) Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27) and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- 28) just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

There seems to have been a real spirit of competition among the 12 – the other disciples were upset that James and John had beaten them to the punch with their request. Jesus patiently explains that the world’s authoritarian emphasis has no place in the church. People who aspire to be the boss are more concerned about themselves than about the people under their authority. That’s not how it is to be in the church – those who are servants are the ones who are considered great.

Although we can correctly say that God’s kingdom is a place where individuals don’t do anything except what they want to do...it’s just as important for us to point out that heaven will be filled with individuals who only want to do what the King of heaven desires. In heaven our desires will be in perfect keeping with God’s. That is a gift from our gracious Lord. Our OT lesson reminded us of this fact: **He will restore us that we may live in his presence.**

And what a life it will be – praising and serving our God not because we have to but because we want to – living a serving in glory. Ah what a life we’ll be able to enjoy with Jesus.

But we don’t have to wait – already now we’re living with Jesus! He’s with us every day and every step of the day. His love and forgiveness satisfy our every need. We are God’s dearly loved people – a people who rejoice to serve the Lord and who sorrow over our own weaknesses and sins. What a life!

As God’s dearly loved people may we take to heart the encouragement of the apostle as we live our lives with Jesus. (Colossians 3:12-17 NIV) **Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13) Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14) And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15) Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16) Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17) And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

Amen.