

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 5B
March 21, 2021
Mark 10:(32-34) 35-45

Divine Service for You

42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

As we follow our Lord on His way to the cross, we hear Him tell the disciples for the third time, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise." (Mark 10:33-34). What hard words those are to hear – for the disciples and for us.

And what do the disciples do in response? James and John said to Him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Did they not hear what He just said? Still Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" They answered, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Their request demonstrates how slow and thick-headed they are. They don't seem to listen. They don't seem to learn what Jesus teaches them. How often would He have to tell them His kingdom is not of this world? How often would He have to tell them that the first will be last and the last will be first? (Mark 10:31). How often would He have to tell them that life with Him is a life of suffering and service? How often would He have to tell them of His impending death and resurrection before they get it? Indeed, they wouldn't get *that* until they saw it with their own eyes.

And as we view this entire episode in our Lord's life, we should see ourselves in the words and actions of the disciples. We're slow learners too. We often suffer from selective hearing or we simply ignore what we don't want to hear. We desire places of honor and glory, or at least some appreciation, or some acknowledgment, for what we've done. If we're brutally honest, we usually want our own way and to be served rather than serve others. When we ask God to give us whatever we want, it usually exhibits the attitude of "not Thy will but mine be done." We, at least occasionally, get upset when someone else gets something we wanted for ourselves. We become jealous when something good happens to someone else, especially when it may come at our expense.

And that's what bothers us about the disciples. They remind us too much of ourselves. James and John were simply taking advantage of their positions as members of the inner circle of disciples. They were sure that Jesus was the Messiah and that He was going to establish His kingdom. They had seen Jesus' glory at His transfiguration, and they simply wanted to be His right- and left-hand men.

So, it's not surprising that the other disciples were upset about this. Not only had James and John asked for those places, but they had beaten the other disciples to the punch. Those others were indignant because they desired those special places for themselves.

But rather than let their ambition get the better of them or let the disciples destroy each other, Jesus nips the situation in the bud. He doesn't want His disciples focused on themselves and on their selfish desires. He wants them focused on service. But Jesus doesn't just talk about service, He serves. He shows them how it is done. Indeed, His whole life was one of divine service. For "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." That's what Jesus had been saying all along.

Christ, God in the flesh, who was worthy of all honor and glory became a servant. He who deserved to be served by all, became a servant to all. He came to serve by teaching God's Word and doing miracles. He came to serve by overcoming Satan and temptation and suffering shamefully at the hands of his enemies. He came to serve by giving His life to ransom us from bondage to sin and death. He came to set us free from our slavery to Satan and our own selfish desires. He came to bring the kingdom of God to us and us to the kingdom of God.

Unlike us, however, Jesus never asked, "What's in it for me?" He never put His own desires first. Rather He put His Father's desires first. And His Father wants "all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Jesus demonstrated to us that godly service is that which is done to God's glory without any thought as to what's in it for me.

That's what Jesus did. He left His glory in heaven to serve us by giving His life for us. He suffered temptation in every way we do, but He never gave in. He put up with a dysfunctional group of disciples. He suffered betrayal. He was denied by one of His closest disciples. Rather than live in glory on earth, He lived the life of a servant. He healed many with broken and diseased bodies. He even raised some from the dead. In all that He did, Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2:6-8). The One who didn't think it below His station to talk with a sinful Samaritan woman or to wash His disciples' feet, served all the way to the cross. And even as He hung on that accursed tree, He never cursed His enemies, His disciples, or us. Rather He asked His Father to forgive them – and us. For we had a part in His death as He died for our sins too. He died for our pride and selfishness and self-seeking.

And as He died such an ignoble death, He also rose again in glory. And He shares that glory with us. In our Baptism we were buried with Him and we were raised with Him. Not that we asked for it or deserve it, but He gave it to us as a free gift. By Spirit-given faith we have places in the kingdom of grace here on earth and we will receive places in the kingdom of glory for eternity. And while on earth we often desire higher and higher levels of honor and glory, in heaven every place will be more glorious than anything we can imagine.

So until we experience that glory in all its fullness, we live in this world and carry our cross. And as we do, our Lord continues to serve us. In the Divine Service He comes to forgive our sins. In the Holy Sacrament He gives us His body and blood which was given and shed for us. And in that precious feast we are empowered to love God and serve one another. We not only have Christ's example, which we can never match, but we have His power to serve others. And while that certainly includes helping the poor and others in need, it also includes serving those in our various vocations in our family, at school, at work, at church, in the world.

By the grace of God repent of your selfish desires for glory in this world. Rejoice that Jesus continues to serve you with the divine service in which He forgives your sins and "cleanses you from all unrighteousness." Praise be to Christ for His unending service which enables you for a life of self-less service to Him and to others. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener