

Mark 10:32-45 (Fifth Sunday in Lent—Series B)

“To Serve and To Die”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

March 21, 2021

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Gospel lesson recorded in Mark 10:

³² And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, “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. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” ³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up 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 do 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 Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” ³⁹ And they said to him, “We are able.” And 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 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 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.

There is a pattern in Mark’s Gospel that involves Jesus’ three passion predictions. The first one occurred just before the Transfiguration. Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ and Jesus then told the disciples that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. Peter, you remember, took Jesus aside and rebuked Him for saying such things, after which Jesus taught the disciples that if they were to follow Him, they must deny themselves and take up their cross. This sets the pattern: Jesus’ prediction of His suffering, death, and resurrection; a misunderstanding of Jesus and His mission; Jesus’ teaches the disciples.

After the Transfiguration, Jesus again predicted His suffering, death, and resurrection, the disciples didn't understand, and He taught them about what it means to be the greatest by being servant of all. In our Gospel this morning, Jesus tells of His suffering, death, and resurrection a third time. But the third time is not the charm. The disciples again failed to grasp the significance of what Jesus has now told them three times. The misunderstanding comes out in James' and John's request to sit one on His right and one on His left in His glory. They figure that, if Jesus is going to Jerusalem, then big things surely are going to happen. Jesus is going to win His victory over the Romans and restore the fallen throne of King David's line. Have they heard nothing of what Jesus has said? Did His words "condemn to death," "deliver over to the Gentiles," "mock, spit, flog, and kill Him," and "after three days rise again" make no impact whatsoever?

Jesus' glory is not the glory they are expecting. James and John are looking for a show of power and authority, of which they would like to have a prime piece. The seats of honor are first to the right and next to the left. James and John wanted to be there, in the places of honor and glory, when Jesus comes into His reign and sets up David's throne again and rules as Messiah and Lord. But that's not the deal. Jesus, as the Messiah, must go through the suffering and death of the cross. For Jesus', glory is found in His suffering, death, and resurrection as He gives His life as a ransom for the many. Jesus' glory is revealed in Him being servant of all.

To understand the necessity of Jesus' coming to serve and to give up His life as a ransom for the many, we have to understand our condition. We, as James and John demonstrated, seek glorification. We want to be the first, the only, the top dog. We want to

fear, love, and trust in our selves above all things. We want to be happy, fulfilled, and in control, especially at the expense of anyone who might want to take away our seat of power and self-authority. That is, after all, the very nature of sin in us. Sin causes us to only think of ourselves and what we want. Sin doesn't have any desire or ability to love or care for another. It's all about "me." In our natural condition, we don't love God, nor do we want to. In our natural condition, we don't love other people. Nor do we want to. In our sinfulness we only want to "love" ourselves, which isn't really love at all, but selfishness and self-centeredness.

But God is love. He is self-sacrificing love. God loved us when we were still trapped in the selfishness and self-centeredness of sin. He loved us when we didn't love Him. God's love is shown to us in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

The love of God is beyond understanding that He should come among sinful, selfish humans and serve us! By rights, the Son of God should have condemned us. He should have come in His heavenly glory and poured out wrath and punishment against every one of us. But no! He comes among us, taking to Himself our human flesh. Jesus the God-Man lives among sinful, selfish, self-centered human as one of us, except without sin. He lived a perfect, self-less life of love toward God the Father and toward His neighbor. Jesus kept God's Commandments to love perfectly. He served us by obeying His Commandments on our behalf so that you and I might receive the credit for having done so.

And then Jesus served humanity with the greatest gift of love. He Himself, the sinless Son of God, drank the cup of God's anger and wrath against sin. Jesus suffered under the

baptism of our punishment of death and hell to ransom us from sin and death. The ransom was the price paid to purchase a servant or slave from indenture or slavery. Jesus came not only to stand in our place under sin's slavery to selfishness and fulfill God's Law for us, but He also came to pay the price for securing our freedom from sin and the punishment of death. Incredibly, the price was His own life. Jesus' precious blood was poured out on the cross to cleanse you from all sins.

The priceless perfection of Jesus' obedience in life and in death and His precious blood shed on the cross were the payment to buy freedom for the entire world. This was the ransom payment that purchases your complete forgiveness of sins—forgiveness for your selfishness and self-centeredness, forgiveness for your lack of love for God and for one another. In the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus for us, we find release from all our sins.

This release, this forgiveness, empowers and enables us to imitate Christ's example of love and service. God did not forgive us through the death and resurrection of Jesus so that we might simply sit around and do nothing. Jesus gave up His life on the cross as a ransom for many so that, cleansed from sin, we might be energized by the Holy Spirit to do the things Jesus modeled for us to do—to be the servant of all. We take the love of God in Christ given freely to us and extend it to our neighbors. Remember, our neighbor is anyone to whom we can show the love and mercy of God in Christ with our words and actions.

Forgiven of our sins, living in the new life of faith in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, you and I are able, as St. Paul says in Philippians 2:3, to "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." In other

words, we are able to resist the temptations to selfishness and self-centeredness by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can, with sins forgiven, in the new life of faith, show love to God and to other people. We are able to demonstrate the love of God in Christ to others in concrete ways.

- We can pray for someone; even better, pray *with* someone.
- We can use our talents to help a neighbor with a home project.
- We can share a kind word and a message of God's love in Jesus with one who is hurting, or grieving, or lonely.
- We can support the missions and ministries of service and mercy of the Church
- We can invite friends, neighbors, and coworkers to church to share in the fellowship of the Body of Christ and to hear His Gospel Word of forgiveness and love.

Now, we could spend the rest of the morning sharing ideas like these. But rather than just talk about serving in Jesus' name, we need to do it. We have the ability and the power to love and serve the people around us. Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, goes with us as we are the mouth, the hands, and the feet of Christ, serving others with His love and mercy. Each person whom we serve is one of "the many" for whom Jesus died and purchased the forgiveness of sins. Each person whom we serve is someone God loves and has saved by the blood of Jesus. So, in the blessed name of Jesus Christ, go, serve, and love others. Help and support, feed and clothe, comfort and care for them in the Name of Jesus. Amen.