

Fifth Sunday of Lent/March 21, 2021
Mark 10:35-45/Ransomed
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“... to give his life as a ransom for many.”

How many times since Ash Wednesday, has Sunday’s Gospel included some variation on the phrase, “[Jesus] began to tell them what was to happen to him, 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. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”” Jesus told His disciples over and over again about the things waiting for Him in Jerusalem. At the same time, the disciples demonstrate over and over again they don’t get it.

Jesus knew the words were getting into their heads. Peter’s confession is spot on: [Matt 16:16] “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The disciples knew Jesus was the promised Christ. They got that part right, but for some reason they couldn’t seem to comprehend what it meant that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus kept telling them, suffering, death and resurrection, but it just wasn’t sinking in.

Now, in the disciples’ defense, what Jesus was about to do is still and will always be a unique event in all of history. It runs completely contrary to our limited human brain to consider the possibility that God Almighty would take on frail human flesh and die for us sinners. This is hard for us even though we have the historical record.

Today’s Gospel provides us with another narrative of confusion on the part of the disciples. For once, it is not Peter who is sticking his foot in his mouth. Instead, it is James and John, the Sons of Zebedee.

These two brothers ask Jesus for the two seats of honor when Jesus comes into His glory. “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” In that culture, sitting didn’t just mean a physical posture, but it could also be used as a term of ruling. So, sitting near someone didn’t just mean they were to be physically close to Jesus, but they were to have a large share of the honor and authority Jesus had. We have brought a little bit of in our own language when we refer to someone as a “right hand man”. Basically, James and John were asking to be number one and two in Jesus’ kingdom.

Their request demonstrates they didn’t understand. In fact, Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking.” The fact is most people don’t know what these brothers were requesting.

Perhaps the biggest problem we have understanding the brothers’ request is in the word “glory”. Glory brings to mind things like God’s presence as a fiery cloud and smoky pillar leading Israel through the wilderness. We think of Mount Sinai shaking in smoke and terrifying the Israelites. We think of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as he glowed with His own self-generated light. We remember the glory of God as the angels announced Jesus’ birth. We may also remember Jesus walking on the water, stilling the storm, healing the sick, raising the dead, and so forth. All these things are demonstrations of the glory of Jesus’ power and authority. When James and John made their request, they were thinking about these signs of Jesus’ glory.

There is much more to Jesus’ glory than power and authority. When John’s faith and understanding matured under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, He would write, [John 12:16] “His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and

had been done to him.” What does the word glorified mean in that verse? What does the word glorified mean when [John 12:23] wrote, “Jesus answered them; “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.””? What does the word glorify mean there?

Jesus’ glory does not just refer to His power and authority. It also refers to His victory on the cross. When we look at the shame of the cross, we see the glory of our savior as He wins salvation for us. As Jesus was walking the road to Jerusalem with His disciples, He began to tell them what was to happen. He was telling how He would bring glory to God by earning salvation for us with His suffering, death, and resurrection.

Jesus had just been explaining the glory of the cross when James and John came to Him. They said to Jesus, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Since Jesus had just been talking about the glory of the cross, James and John were asking to be crucified, one on Jesus’ right and the other on His left. No wonder Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking.” They demonstrated they did not understand.

We are like James and John. We think glory is all about power, authority, and control. We want that kind of glory. We want to be important, honored, number one. We want to be the center of attention. We are greedy and self-centered. Jesus tells us the truly great are those who serve, but we are not interested in serving. Jesus tells us the leader should take up the vocation of slave, but we are not interested in being slaves. We aren’t interested in doing things Jesus’ way. We want our way we want when we want it. Jesus must tell us what He told James and John, “You do not know what you are asking.”

James and John unknowingly asked for crucifixion with Jesus. Our self-centered attitude earns us something much worse than a reservation on a cross. It earns us eternal punishment in hell where there is no sense of God's presence. A person can be number one in hell because, in spite of the fact many will suffer in hell, each of them will experience hell in the utter torment of total loneliness. The loneliness of hell will allow every tormented soul there to be number one, for they will sense no one but themselves.

Fortunately for James and John, and you and me, Jesus does not have a problem with His role as servant and slave. Even as Jesus set the standard for us, He also kept that standard. He continued to teach His disciples in spite of their stubbornness and He said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Even though we don't serve as we should, Jesus still became the perfect servant for us as St. Paul write, [Phi 2:8] "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." In Jesus Christ we see the glory of victory in the agony of the cross. The Book of Hebrews records, [Heb 2:9] "We see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

Jesus Christ confirmed that victory when He rose from the dead just as He had said. In His resurrection, He certified His perfect service; His role as perfect slave in order to offer us perfect salvation. He now offers us forgiveness when do not offer ourselves as servants and slaves. He offers us forgiveness for seeking our own glory, power, and pride. He offers us the salvation He earned with His glorious victory on the cross.

We, like James and John, want glory for ourselves. We want popularity, fame, power, security, and all the other things that serve our own self-interest. This is one more symptom of the sin around us and in us while we live in this world.

Jesus came for a different kind of glory. He came to rescue you from this world of sin by submitting to death on a cross. He has a special honor and glory because of the suffering of that death and He revealed that honor and glory with His resurrection from death. Now He offers salvation to you through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith for He gave His life as a ransom for you, so you can live with Him forever in the new heavens and the new earth.