

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Quinquagesima Sunday, February 23, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 342 (14:5) 367, 354, 370:1

Lessons: Jeremiah 8:4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; Mark 10:35-45.

Sermon Text: Matthew 20:17-28

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

This Sunday is called Quinquagesima Sunday. Its literal meaning is 50 days before Easter. The text for this Sunday is presented in order to prepare our hearts for a profitable Lenten season. In this Lenten season we want to meditate on our Savior's suffering and death. We need to ask ourselves: What does our Savior's suffering and death mean to us? Do we apply the truths of the Passion History to ourselves and realize that Jesus suffered and died because of our sins and to atone for our sins?

May we think of these questions as we meditate on

**JESUS' ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS PASSION**

- 1. Jesus teaches us the purpose of his passion;**
- 2. Jesus teaches us what true lowliness and service in his kingdom means.**

Jesus was on his last journey to Jerusalem. He announced to his disciples what was going to happen there. *"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"* Imagine what a shock this must have been to the disciples! Jesus had told them twice before of his suffering and death, but not in such great detail. This third announcement of his passion told the disciples that it would take place at the coming Passover Festival. He told them that he would be betrayed. He told them that the Jewish religious leaders would be responsible for his suffering and death. He told them that he would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, referring to the Roman soldiers who scourged, mocked and crucified him. Finally, he told them of his glorious resurrection on the third day. The disciples could learn that Jesus by revealing all that would happen to him showed himself to be true God who knows all things.

In view of what Jesus said of his forthcoming Passion what we read in our text seems strange. *"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. '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.'" The two sons of Zebedee were James and John. She was asking for her sons the highest honor in Jesus' kingdom. Such a request for great honor for her sons was out of place when Jesus spoke of being rejected by the very people to whom he was sent as the Messiah and then suffering and dying.*

Jesus did not rashly promise anything to her, but with love and patience explained, *"You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"* Jesus answered the request of the two disciples and their mother with figurative language speaking of a cup of suffering. He was referring to his suffering, shedding of blood, and death on the cross. The same figurative language was used by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. At that time Peter used his sword, thinking to protect Jesus from his captors. But Jesus said, *"Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"* John 18:11. Jesus' willingness to suffer and die is evident from what he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: *"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. Jesus' agony in

the garden would be exceedingly great because he knew what lay ahead for him, namely his suffering and death by crucifixion. In effect Jesus was asking the two disciples if they were willing to endure what he had to endure to make atonement for the sin of the world.

Before we hear the answer of the two disciples, let us learn about Jesus' purpose in coming to this earth and suffering and dying for sinners. Jesus told them, ***"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom."*** A ransom is required for something very valuable, like the life of someone who has been kidnapped. The ransom Jesus spoke of was the payment of a price to redeem lost sinners. All of us are by nature lost and condemned sinners, lost in sin and condemned to everlasting damnation. In the Second Article explanation in our Catechism Luther speaks of Jesus Christ "my lord; who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death." Jesus paid the most precious ransom price ever paid because he loved us so much. Speaking of Jesus' shedding his blood for sinners, Paul reminds us, ***"You were bought at a price,"*** 1 Corinthians 6:20. And speaking of being redeemed, Paul writes, ***"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,"*** Ephesians 1:7. With the payment of this precious price, we were redeemed from all our sins, from death in hell, and from the power of the devil. Jesus Christ suffered and died as our Divine Substitute as Isaiah writes, ***"The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all,"*** Isaiah 53:6. He did this for us so that we might not have to suffer in hell, but have life eternal in heaven. This was the purpose of Christ's passion and on this we want to meditate in the coming Lenten season.

Now we go back to the disciples' answer to Jesus' question and how Jesus answered them. In this **Jesus teaches us what true lowliness and service in his kingdom means.**

## 2.

When Jesus asked John and James, ***"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"*** they answered, ***"We can."*** The disciples spoke in ignorance, not comprehending what great suffering and death Jesus referred to. They also promised more than they could fulfill, for no mere man is able to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world, or even for just his own sins. But Jesus is ***"is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,"*** John 1:29.

Then Jesus explained to them what true lowliness and service in his kingdom means. ***"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."*** Jesus spoke of the disciples drinking from his cup, that is, suffering and dying and shedding their blood as his followers. James was beheaded for the sake of Christ, and John lived a long life of tribulations for Jesus' sake. Jesus was not speaking of them paying for their sins or for the sins of others. They indeed would experience suffering as his followers, but not for the purpose of meriting forgiveness of their sins. So we also cannot do anything to merit forgiveness of our sins or eternal life. Jesus has already done that for us perfectly. But the Bible does speak of us suffering, even giving up our life, for the sake of our faith. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about suffering ***"persecutions and trials,"*** 2 Thessalonians 1:4. Paul also spoke of his own suffering and death as Christ's follower, ***"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure,"*** 2 Timothy 4:6. We must expect many hardships and tribulations because the world hates us and we want to be faithful to Christ. Jesus said, ***"As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you,"*** John 15:19. Peter writes, ***"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed,"*** 1 Peter 4:12-13.

But to give special places of honor in heaven, Jesus said, ***"is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."*** Our only concern should be to remain steadfast in the true faith.

The request of Zebedee's sons through their mother made the other disciples indignant. So Jesus took this opportunity to teach all the disciples a lesson about true lowliness and service in his kingdom. ***"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so***

**with you.**” Jesus was afraid that his disciples would imitate the example of what is done by secular rulers. Those who have power and rule over others use their authority and position of leadership to gain more power and to advance their own cause. That is what we call power politics in our day, and as we hear about it in the news it fills us with disgust. But that’s the way of the world. That must not be done in the Church among Christians. In the Church a different principle applies. Jesus says, **“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – 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.”** Here is an important lesson for all Christians to learn. Greatness is not measured by the amount of authority exercised in the Church, but by the amount of service rendered to others in Jesus’ name. Jesus himself is the best example of this. Jesus, **“being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”** Philippians 2:6-8. Christ’s humble service resulted in a most glorious blessing, the salvation of lost sinners.

We should learn to follow Christ’s example of lowliness and humility in whatever position we find ourselves. If anyone occupies a position of leadership in the Church, let him not be high-minded, but humbly serve the Lord according to his Word. If we have no special office or position in the congregation, let us not envy those who have. In the Church greatness is not measured by big numbers or by boastful accomplishments, but by faithful, humble, child-like obedience to Christ and his holy Word. Worldly ambition is out of place in the Church.

This sadly is not the case in the churches that have a power structure with bishops and archbishops over the ordinary clergy. In any church body with an Episcopal form of church government by bishops, the lesson that Christ teaches in our text is not followed. Especially in the hierarchy found in the Roman Catholic Church, having a church government with bishops, archbishops, cardinals, with the pope in the top position, this is especially bad. For in this church the pope teaches that he is taking the place of Christ as head of the Church (Vicar of Christ) and hands down man-made rulings contrary to God’s Word. Jesus teaches, **“You have only one Master and you are all brothers. ... The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted,”** Matthew 23:8,11-12.

Worldly ambition is out of place in the Church. Our business as believers in Christ is to quietly serve the Lord whatever our position may be. We are to obediently hear the Word and help spread the Gospel to as many sin-benighted souls as possible. Lord, help us to do this. Amen.

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