

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Quinquagesima Sunday, March 6, 2011

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

Hymns: 409, 75:3, 421, 412, 293.

Lessons: 2 Samuel 22:1-7, Ephesians 5:1-10, Luke 11:14-28.

Sermon Text: Mark 10:35-45.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus was making his last journey to Jerusalem with his disciples when the incidents mentioned in our text took place. During his ministry on this earth Jesus spent a great deal of time preaching about the Kingdom of God to his disciples and the others that heard him. Many people expected that Jesus would establish a wonderful earthly kingdom. In spite of all his preaching even Jesus' disciples had ideas and dreams about an earthly kingdom as we see from our text.

People today have similar thoughts about the church. They have materialistic views of the church. They believe that if a church has many members it is really strong. They believe in a lot of publicity for the church. They believe that all denominations should unite for the common purpose of fighting poverty, or fighting injustice or some such earthly concern. These people forget that the true church is the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. They forget that the Word of God is more powerful and efficient than all the man-made publicity. They forget that the first and chief purpose of the church is to preach the Word of God. People who advocate such things often are the leaders of the church. They have great ambitions about how to build the church. Let us, my friends, learn from Christ's Word:

WHO IS REALLY GREAT IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

- 1. He who does not seek his own honor,**
- 2. He who is willing to take the road of suffering to glory, and**
- 3. He who is willing to be a humble servant.**

1.

We are told in Scripture that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. He was determined to go there even though he knew that he would be crucified. The disciples had been told what would soon happen to their Lord and Master. Jesus had many times spoken of his suffering and death to his disciples. He wanted to impress this fact upon the minds of his disciples. They would be his apostles to go into the world preaching the Word. He wanted them to forget about their carnal ideas of an earthly Messianic Kingdom. Because of the constant repetition of the fact that Jesus would not establish an earthly kingdom, but that he would suffer and die for the sins of all people, the sons of Zebedee should have known better than to ask what they did of Jesus.

We read: "*Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.' 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked. They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.'*" Matthew tells us that it was the mother of the sons of Zebedee who made such a request for her sons. What a foolish mother to ask such a thing of Christ! The sons of Zebedee were James and John. These two disciples together with Peter were the favored disciples of the Lord. Having just heard the teachings of Jesus about the Kingdom of God, the disciples greatly grieved their Lord by their request.

What urged them to request such a thing of the Lord? They were asking that they above all men have the place of honor in the Kingdom of God. They wanted to be great in the Kingdom of God. Perhaps these two disciples were bolder about making such a request because they were among the first four disciples called to

follow Jesus. But, this would not alone cause them to make such a request. It was really a terrible wicked thing called pride which prompted their request. They were too proud.

Jesus in his kindness did not roughly rebuke them, but had consideration for their sinful weaknesses. He gently rebuked them by telling them that they did not know what they were asking. Jesus pointed out to them their spiritual ignorance, their lack of important spiritual knowledge. These disciples forgot about the important thing in the Kingdom of God, namely the forgiveness of sins, and that they had need of it. They thought only of being princes and lords in the Lord's Kingdom.

There are those in the church today who have the Zebedee spirit. They like to lord it over others, outshine others in the church. Some become upset when they are not properly rewarded or recognized by the congregation. In the 31st verse of this chapter Jesus said: ***"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*** Mark 10:31. On judgment day there will be many corrections made in the Who's Who of church histories and biographies, and many a humble, forgotten soul, whose name was never mentioned in the records of the church on earth, will shine as bright as the morning star in the Kingdom of Glory. He who is truly great in the Kingdom of God will not, therefore, seek his own honor.

2.

Another thing that Christ here teaches is that he who is truly great in the Kingdom of God will be willing to take the road of suffering to glory. ***"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?'"*** Jesus refers here to a cup and to a baptism. The ancient Greeks made their criminals drink a cup of poison as a way of putting them to death. To drink the cup of suffering was the way Jesus described his suffering and death. As to the baptism – the church fathers speak of three baptisms, the baptism with water, the baptism with the Holy Ghost in receiving the gifts of the Spirit, and the baptism of blood or the shedding of blood. Jesus referred to the shedding of his blood on the cross.

Jesus asked James and John if they are willing to endure the suffering and death that he would endure to redeem the world. The two disciples very boldly answered that they were able to drink this cup and to be baptized with that baptism that Jesus referred to. That, of course, they could not do. Only Jesus could. Jesus does not deny that they would have to suffer for his sake. Jesus said unto them, ***"You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with."*** Jesus here foretells that the disciples would have to suffer in the future for his sake. Thus it was also that the disciples all suffered greatly because they were followers of Jesus and because they fervently preached his Word. All except John suffered a martyr's death. In St. Paul's epistle the sufferings that he endured are listed – imprisonment, whipping, ship-wreck, hatred, ill treatment, persecutions of all kinds and finally death.

We Christians today are not different from the disciples in this respect. It is the lot of the Christian to endure much suffering on this earth. ***"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."*** Acts 14:22. One who is truly great in the Kingdom of God will be willing to take this road of suffering before he or she obtains the glory of heaven. That does not mean that a person earns salvation in heaven by his suffering as some people think. The redemption of all people was finished when Christ died on the cross. We have this redemption as our own by believing and accepting what Christ has done for us. But God does put many a burden and cross on those who are his in order to keep them humble and keep them on the path to heaven. Therefore, when we as Christians experience the chastening hand of God upon us, we are not to conclude that God is angry with us and is punishing us. God does not punish Christians. He only chastens them in his great love. And so also, we are not to think that all is well when we are happy and have no misfortunes. When God lays a cross on you, thank him with all your heart, for then you know that you have a gracious God who is interested in your spiritual welfare and your eternal salvation.

But Jesus tells his disciples: ***"to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."*** Salvation is entirely in God's hands. He has from eternity prepared the places of honor and selected those who shall occupy them.

The second answer then to the question: who is truly great in the Kingdom of God? – he who is willing to take the road of suffering to glory. With Christ as our example, let us by his strength willingly suffer crosses, persecutions, hatred, and whatever burdens our God may see fit to give us.

“When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” James and John were not the only ones among the disciples who had pride in their hearts and were desirous of honor. The other 10 disciples were jealous when James and John made their request. Jesus knew their thoughts as he can look into the hearts of men. He therefore called them aside for the purpose of teaching them a lesson in humility. It is good for us to be reminded that a true Christian is humble. Let us therefore consider the third answer to the question: who is truly great in the Kingdom of God? The answer is: he who is willing to be a humble servant.

Jesus shows what he means by true humility by making a comparison between the people of the world and Christians. In the kingdoms of the world man achieves power and greatness at the expense of those who are lower than he. When a man of this world has power and authority he often uses it to gain more power and authority. That is part of the explanation as to why the world today is in such a troubled condition as it is. Jesus says that is not the way it should be among Christians.

Among Christians greatness is measured not by the amount of power and authority exercised, but by the amount of humble service rendered. The greater the service that is rendered in unselfish humility, the higher will be the standing of a person in God’s Kingdom. The higher we would ascend, the lower we must be willing to descend in our labor of love in God’s Kingdom. Christ wishes to teach us this: my Kingdom is different from those of this world. Greatness is here measured, not by the amount of authority and favorable publicity from men, but by the amount of humble and unselfish service which you render me by serving your fellow man in every need of body and soul.

And speaking of unselfish service, we have Christ as our example. He, the great Lord of heaven, who came to earth as the Son of Man, who might have demanded and enlisted the service of all creation, did not demand and accept this service, but himself became the lowest servant of all. That was the object of Christ coming to this earth. He came to be humbled unto death, to give his life as a ransom for many. A ransom is the price which is demanded to redeem something or someone. In this case we were estranged from God because of our sin. God demanded a ransom for us. That ransom was the price which Christ, God’s Son, paid on the cross when he shed his holy precious blood for us. Here we are taught about the forgiveness of sin and how we may obtain it. With our works and merits we are lost; for we owe God such a great sum that it is impossible for us to pay it. How then may we become rid of our guilt? In no other way but that our dear Lord Jesus Christ accepts our guilt and takes our sins from us and lays them on his back and suffers the punishment which we had earned by our sins. All this was done in order that we might be free and liberated from eternal death. What a wonderful example our Savior gives us in unselfish, humble service!

Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven? Who is the greatest in our congregation? God only knows. But this we do know according to our text: that Christ’s Word says *“whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”*

If we follow the example of Jesus we will never ask such a foolish question as did James and John. Such thoughts of greatness will be farthest from our minds as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our dear Lord and Savior and strive to serve him unselfishly and humbly in his Kingdom. May God give us the grace to do this. Amen.

(First Preached February 29, 1948.)