

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 53:4-12

Psalms 91:9-16

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

10/20/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward 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 is it 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 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then 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 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the

Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

In Over Our Heads

Good morning! My family was in Miami for a business trip. We were tagging along while dad did all the not-so-fun work stuff while on a cruise. But we left port from Miami, and people in the company had gone out together for dinner the night before we sailed out. I was maybe 10-12 years old. We were eating dinner at what I think was a Cuban restaurant. I was young and naive, still believing that the more a person could endure, the stronger they were. So when the servers warned us that the salsa was hot, I felt compelled to give it a try. I watched as one grown man gave it a try and in pain warned everyone they weren't kidding. I watched as my own dad turned a shade of red I had never seen before, and this was a guy who could handle hot things. I took a chip and put a small dot of salsa on it before sending it home. This was roughly 25 years ago, that's how formational this experience was for me! Tears immediately came to my eyes. What happened next is still a bit of a blur. Flashes of fire, red, and flames like the steel mills along the Ohio River took over my life. I quickly consumed the drink in front of me, and then the water of those around me. I retreated to the restroom to hide my embarrassment where I washed my mouth out with water for about 10 minutes. Altogether, not the best decision I had made. I had gotten in way over my head.

Now, while I survived my encounter, I was hardly the first person to ask for something that I didn't understand. Two of the disciples in today's text do the same thing too.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, or the sons of thunder as it could also be translated, approach Jesus and ask for places of privilege. It's astounding. For the past month or two we've been following Jesus along in the Gospel of Mark and regardless of how many times he tells his followers that this is a life and ministry that will give the world something other than traditional glory, they continue to just get it wrong time after time. When the other disciples realize what James and John have asked for, they become indignant, because they want that too! Let alone the audacity of approaching a teacher/healer/miracle worker and asking for this sort of privilege. It just shouldn't be done.

What becomes clear to us readers is that James and John misunderstand Jesus when he asks them if they can drink from the cup that he will drink, or be baptized with his baptism. They do not understand what we're getting into.

Which brings us to Isaiah. For a long time those that believed in the messiah thought that he would be a great leader. Maybe someone like King David who would throw off whoever was ruling the Jewish people, or a great High Priest in the temple who would call the people to a time of change. What they all thought was that this person would be blessed with power and strength as the world defined it. What they didn't expect was for the messiah to be crucified and killed. In fact, scripture seemed to say the exact opposite, "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.*"¹

¹ Galatians 3:13b NRSVUE

So when Jesus died and was resurrected, they needed to make sense of what they had seen and known to be true. So they turned back to our passage from Isaiah. It's called the Suffering Servant text. Christians looked back at Scripture and made a connection with what happens here in Isaiah, and what happened to Jesus. *"4Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. 6All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all... 11Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. 12Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."*²

This is the cup that Jesus will drink, this is the baptism with which he will be baptized. The suffering servant, Jesus, the Messiah, they are one and the same.

So, Jesus for the millionth time begins to teach the disciples again. *"...but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

² Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12 NRSV

The disciples don't realize it, but they have been called to something far greater than they could ever realize or imagine. They will be challenged in ways that they couldn't understand. God will push them to what they think is their limits, and then keep going. Emily and TC, little Ainsley that we'll soon baptize will do the same thing to you too! But I think we can find some hope in our Gospel text too.

Jesus challenges the disciples and all of us to be servants, to change the paradigm. The disciples saw it first hand in the few years they spent with Jesus on earth, and we see it every time we gather together to read scripture. But it's important to remember that Jesus isn't asking us to become victims! Our service is an act bestowed upon the world in love. We take it upon ourselves willingly, like parents do at the birth of a child.

The crazy thing is that like the disciples, we are pushed beyond what we ever thought was imaginable. We, like the disciples, don't understand what we're getting into, and yet God pushes us anyway! But it doesn't end there. We are given strength to bear the burden. We are filled up by the Holy Spirit. The mark of our own baptism serves as the starting point for the good work that God will accomplish in us. We can do hard things because God has done even more. We love because God has first loved us. Sure, we don't understand everything ahead, but that's ok, because God does. And that sounds like enough to me. Amen.