

SERMON FOR MARCH 21, 2021

TEXT: MARK 10: 35-45

THEME: DRINKING THE CUP THAT JESUS DRINKS

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

In the name of Jesus:

When I played sports in high school, first at Lutheran East and then at Lutheran West in Cleveland, I had coaches that told us that they didn't want us to think of finishing first, rather, they taught us to strive to finish fourth. That was odd back then and it is certainly different today, but they coaches were telling us in no uncertain terms that in life, you place God first, your family second, others third, and finally, in the fourth position, you place yourself fourth. It is an interesting way to think of living, and it gets at the point that Jesus is making today when He tells His disciples and we who follow Him to be ready to drink the cup that Jesus drinks.

What is the cup that Jesus drinks? Well, to set the stage, James and John cozy up to Jesus to ask a request, that is, to reserve a place of honor for them in the Coming Kingdom of Jesus. They want to sit at Jesus' right and left hand, in positions of power and glory. Now, when the other disciples get wind of their request, they were upset, not only because of the power play by James and John, but probably also because of the fact that they didn't get to Jesus first to

ask of Him the same thing. Jesus' response is the basis of our message this morning, and He responds in the form of a question: " Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Jesus here is not talking about the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, what He is talking about how He is the One sent by God to serve sinners. Jesus is asking the sons of Zebedee whether they are willing to undergo tribulation and persecution similar to what Jesus will face and experience. Jesus asks the question, and they answer yes!

But they didn't know what they were answering when they asked the question. Oh, yes, they certainly were persecuted for believing in Jesus. James died as a martyr for the faith, and John was exiled to the island of Patmos at the end of his life. They learned the hard way that following Jesus wasn't easy. They had to learn to do what Jesus instructed, that in order to follow Him one must serve Him, and in doing so you must deny self, take up the cross, and follow Christ.

Sadly, we are a lot like James, John, and the other disciples. We want to follow Jesus, but we want the road to be easy. None of us want to suffer, and it is really hard to deny yourself. We live in a culture that teaches us to think for ourselves and look out for ourselves. The world teaches that if you don't look out for yourself, no one else will. And our sinful nature encourages each of us

to look out for ourselves, because our hearts and wills are by their very nature turned inward. That is why parents strive to teach their children NOT to be selfish, because the old sinful nature is a self centered, selfish nature.

Not so for Jesus! Jesus' will was to do the will of the One who sent Him. That is why throughout His life Jesus sought to love the Lord His God and serve Him by serving and living for others. Jesus said of Himself that: "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." The Apostle Paul explains that Jesus: who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

The life of the one who believes and follows Jesus is a life of self sacrifice and service to others. Jesus calls you to deny yourself, take up the cross and follow Him. That means in following Jesus you will live as He calls you to live, and that very well may mean that you may indeed be called to suffer for Him. Living for Jesus, it sounds simple enough but in reality it is a really really hard thing to do.

So Jesus comes to give you help, for He is your very present Help in times of trouble. He comes to bring you Help by offering Himself to you. And

how does He do that? He does it in your Baptism, and He does it in the Lord's Supper. For anyone who is baptized into Christ has put on Christ, Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit lives in and through you. In Baptism your sins are not only washed away, but that sinful nature that bugs you and plagues you until you die is crucified with Christ, and it is drowned to die. Each and every day when you confess your sins and ask God for forgiveness, Jesus drowns the sinful self so that a new person arises daily to follow Jesus and serve Him anew.

And whenever you come to the Lord's table, there Jesus is. He says: "Take eat, this is My body, take drink, this is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all of your sins." Here, today, Jesus comes to you in the Lord's Supper, in, with, and under the bread and wine, so that you can taste and know that Jesus forgives you, He comes today to strengthen your faith, He comes to feed you with Himself, all so that you are empowered now to live for Him.

Here is what living for Jesus looks like: "Whoever will be great among you shall be your servant, and whoever of you will be chief must be a servant of all." To be great in the eyes of Christ means that you deny yourself, and live for Jesus by letting Him work through you to serve others. The Christian life

is one of not being served but one of service, of helping others, just as Jesus did and does still today.

Think of all the ways Jesus helped and ministered to others during His ministry and life of service. He fed the hungry, helped the poor, to the broken hearted He gave hope, to the dying He gave life. Anyone who came to Him He didn't shun, He was a friend and Savior for all.

Now think of the ways that you can help and minister to others in your life. Can you help feed the hungry by working at the Food Pantry or by serving food in a food line at one of the shelters in our area? Can you help the poor by giving to the poor through the various relief agencies available? Can you lend a listening ear to someone who needs to talk? Can you pray with someone who is going through a tough time in their life? Can you share your faith with someone who doesn't know Jesus so that they might not only know the hope that is within you, but so that they might also come to faith in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit?

There is a great story about a hospital nurse who saw a tired, anxious young man outside the room of an elderly man. So, she took his arm and ushered him to the bedside of the elderly man, stooped down, and whispered in the man's ear: "Your son is here."

She repeated this several times in the elderly man's ear until he was able to hear clearly and in response, he opened his eyes. He was heavily debilitated and only saw dimly the figure of the young man standing beside his bed. He reached out his hand and the younger man tightly wrapped his fingers around it, squeezing the hand in encouragement. The nurse then brought a chair to the bedside and the young man sat there all night, holding the older man's hand and offering gentle words of encouragement. The dying man said nothing. As the sun rose the next day, the older man died. The young man gently placed on the bed the lifeless hand that he had been holding and went to notify the nurse.

The nurse began to offer words of sympathy to the young man but he interrupted her asking, "Who was that man?" The puzzled nurse replied, "I thought he was your father." The young man replied, "No, I had never seen him before in my life before yesterday."

The nurse was horrified and asked: "Then why didn't you say something?" The young man replied, "I sensed he needed his son and his son wasn't here, so I just figured that he needed me."

The young man didn't think of himself. He was a servant. May we all seek to deny ourselves, and so serve our Lord where we are needed.

Amen