

March 21, 2021

Mark 10:35-45

“His Cup and Our Cup”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our Gospel lesson for this morning we see that James and John have a twisted understanding of Jesus and his kingdom. We should not be so hard on them. They are only asking what any one of us might want. They want to be a part of what they think will be the incredible, earthly success of Jesus. The problem is that they do not understand that real success is love for another. Their dullness is almost comical, for Jesus had just made it perfectly clear in the verses before our Gospel text (Mark 10:33-34): “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.”

Success is generally defined as the accomplishment of “a favorable or desired outcome.” What is crucial to the definition of success is to determine what one happens to think is the favorable or desired outcome. In other words, it all comes down to how one measures success. James and John want to be great. They wanted to be important and have it all. They wanted to bask in an earthly glory that they thought would come from being close to Jesus. However, success for Jesus was a love outside of himself. It was about rescuing people who do not deserve it. It meant that he would have to go to a cross and drink a horrible tasting cup. It was about a glory for others, and a glory not here and now but in the future. James and John wanted to be great and Jesus wanted to be a slave who serves by drinking the cup of the cross so that others might have forgiveness and a glorious, forever future.

We are as dull as James and John whenever we want to control our lives, thinking that if we can get close enough to Jesus that this will guarantee a down here that will be a success in how we measure it. We want to be great too. And we think that if we just believe in Jesus he will give us a happy life down here. We think that if we do our best then God will give to us the desires of our hearts and we will know very little to no trouble. We look for a cup in this life that will overflow with abundance. And we mistakenly believe that if we get it, that will be proof that God is on our side. This lie is exposed in our text. Jesus says to James and John:

“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And 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, 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.”

First, James and John had it all wrong, and we do too whenever we think that Jesus is our golden ticket to the good life down here. Secondly, their asking was way off, as is often the case in our own prayers. Thirdly, the cup that they will drink and the baptism they will be baptized with comes from the cup and the baptism of Jesus. Finally, glory in the kingdom is something that has been prepared and not yet realized. It is still in the future and far away from the down here. This text is a good dose of smelling salts for James and John. You know what smelling salts do. They are used as a stimulant to restore consciousness after being knocked out or having fainted. They wake you up and make you aware. I dare

say that we and American Christianity could use a good wake up in our gospel text. So today we consider **His Cup and Our Cup**.

To begin with, what was Jesus' cup? We have already said that it was to drink the cross for each and every one of our sins. This, Jesus made clear when he spoke to the disciples about his sufferings and death. Nevertheless, there are a few observations in which we may add. This cup of sorrow and anguish was so deep and awful that we can have no adequate comprehension of what Jesus was going through in the garden of Gethsemane, on the night of his arrest when he said (Mark 14:36): "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." The great victory in the garden was when Jesus submitted his human will to the will of his Father in heaven. Jesus took to himself the burden of every human saying "no" to God, and overturned it all when he said "yes" to his heavenly Father and willingly went to drink the cup of the cross.

Behold the cup he drinks for you and me! You might remember that at the beginning of his crucifixion it says that those who crucified him "... offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it (Mark 15:23)." The drink that they offered him was another opportunity to say "no" to God, for wine mixed with myrrh was a momentary kindness that was designed to partially alleviate some of the suffering of one who was crucified. Jesus refused anything that would numb him to the physical agony and spiritual pain that he would experience for the sins of the world. And after he had endured so much, he cries out, "I Thirst," in order that he may receive the final drop of suffering and insult in the sour wine. John says, "When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30)." So Jesus drank his cup to its very dregs for you and me.

His Cup and Our Cup is the theme of our message. So, how is all of this our cup? One thing for sure is that an understanding of the cup we drink will dispel the same silliness in us that we find in James and John. It will show us what it means to be a Christian and erase any idea that being a Christian is for the purpose of having it all in this life. To understand how it is our cup, we should begin by pondering these words of Jesus in Mark 14:23, "And he [Jesus] took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it." It was his blood that he gave them to drink for the forgiveness of their sins. That is the most important thing we need to know. The cup in which we drink is the love of Christ for us and the hope of real and everlasting glory in the presence of Jesus our Savior who loved us with an amazing, undeserved love.

However, because we drink from this cup in a fallen and unbelieving world, with devils still doing their nefarious work, and because we still carry around with us the sinful flesh, the life of the Christian is one of suffering with Jesus. There can be no other way. Jesus said to his disciples and he says to us, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me (Luke 9:23)." The cup of Jesus is full of the cross and for us full of forgiveness. But, because it is the cup of the cross in which we drink in this fallen and unbelieving world, with devils still doing their work, and because we still wrestle with sin, it causes the sufferings of Jesus to spill over into our lives. We suffer with him, but not to offset our sins and save ourselves, but because we love him and proclaim his death until he comes. And everything opposed to the gospel of forgiveness will necessarily cause us suffering.

His Cup and Our Cup are connected. It is first a cup we drink for forgiveness, life, and salvation. It is secondly a cup that is opposed to our own sinful nature. It is thirdly a cup that causes this unbelieving world and the devils to rage against us as they had raged against our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is why we find that there is so much against us in so many ways. But God is wise and uses it all the same to turn it around and keep us from falling away.

When we drink the cup of forgiveness, life, and salvation, there is no way around this cup also being a cup of suffering for our identity in Jesus. So, the sufferings, death and resurrection that we saw in Jesus is going to be in many and various ways what we see in our own lives. Any delusions that we might have of greatness and grandeur becoming a Christian are going to be assaulted by everything that is opposed to Jesus, even our own sinful desires. In 1 Peter 2:20b-21 it is written, “But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” And again it says in 1 Peter 4:1-2, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.” And finally, we must not forget these words of comfort in 1 Peter 4:13-14, “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

Jesus is asking us, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” Prayerfully we can respond by saying as James and John said, “We are able!” But prayerfully there is a big difference. May it be that when we say “We are able!” we are not only understanding what it really means to drink from the cup of his cross of forgiveness and salvation, but that in our drinking we may also embrace the suffering that goes with it, and genuinely rejoice! Indeed, may we say with the apostle Paul in Romans 8:18, “... I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott