

Sermon Draft

Text: Mark 10:(32–34) 35–45

Sermon: “This Cup”

It’s the last Sunday of Lent, and our annual journey to the cross is nearing its climax. In our Old Testament reading the Lord promises to forgive the iniquity of those who so blatantly broke his covenant, and he became the source of eternal salvation by his obedience through suffering. That the innocent Jesus should be sacrificed for someone else’s sin goes against our idea fair-mindedness. But he did it for us and for all sinners, in order *“that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul.”* Lent is a time of more intense reflection on our sinful nature, that we may appreciate all the more the sweet victory of life over death in the resurrection to come.

James and John come to Jesus asking for a special place in heaven so Jesus ask: *“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* (v 38).

Maybe the question should be: Are you sure you want this Cup?

Jesus will drink of that cup, the cup that John and James think they want. They don't understand what they've asked for. Jesus will drink from the cup of suffering, the cup of death, the cup filled with the sin of the world, not because he thought it would be tasty or fun, not even because he wanted to, but because it was the will of the Father.

“Abba, Father,” he prayed in the garden a few days later, ***“All things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will”*** (14:36).

For Jesus, the time was almost fulfilled, and the hour was at hand. ***“Jesus was walking ahead of them”*** (v 32), setting the pace. He was on a mission to Jerusalem—Jesus ***“set his face to go to Jerusalem”*** (Luke 9:51)—and those straggling behind him weren't sure what the rush was about. Why the determination? In reality, it's a death march; the disciples don't get that yet, but they follow their Lord on the journey nevertheless.

It's a march toward Calvary, a march that started in Bethlehem and continued at the Jordan River. Jesus is on a journey that must be completed for our salvation. The journey that leads to Jerusalem, where he will be condemned and delivered up to the chief priests and the scribes, where he will be mocked, spit upon, flogged, and killed, where he will rise again. Just as he said would happen. Just as he said three times in our Gospel.

That wasn't what the disciples wanted to hear. Success and glory don't look like a dead guy on a cross. How can humiliation and death have anything to do with God restoring his kingdom?

James and John and all the disciples, really were more interested in their future careers of presumed earthly glory. Even among the elect, it seemed to them that "who you know" is important. James and John must have figured they were special already after all, they were invited to the transfiguration, along with Peter. But since there's only a right hand and a left hand, Peter would just have to fend for himself.

It seems so seedy and underhanded; elbowing your way to the top is hardly loving your neighbor. The other apostles were indignant. They were probably annoyed that they hadn't asked first! Like the rest of us sinners, they craved the attention, the recognition, for their own accomplishments. Like children shoving their brothers and sisters out the way, we want the important people and the world to notice: "Hey, Dad, look at me!"

We are not immune to this. Our selfish and sinful natures want the glory, the authority, the power that we perceive comes from being the one in charge. Or even if we don't want to be in charge, we want to have input, and we definitely don't want to be ignored, treated as if we don't really matter.

Like the apostles, we get caught up in ourselves. We stop looking at our neighbor as someone to serve, and instead look inside and say, "What do *I* want?" In this way, the church becomes fractured, congregations split, husbands and wives divorce, children and parents stop talking to one another.

That's not how God created it to be. ***“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve”*** (v 45).

Jesus dismissed their request. It's not his to grant, he says, but the Father's. They will drink the cup. They will all suffer for proclaiming Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. According to tradition, most of the twelve were murdered. None of them had the celebrity life of a televangelist, the fast cars, the luxury houses; instead they were often hated and reviled, stoned, stabbed, and crucified. James was the first to go, beheaded by Herod Agrippa I in Acts 12. And it's said that an attempt was made to kill John with poisoned wine. He died in exile for daring to preach Jesus.

“You do not know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (v 38).

They said yes, they were. Did they know the hostility with which they would be received? Did they know that they and future followers of Jesus would be beheaded, burned alive, tortured, and drowned for taking up their cross?

Did you know that *you* would be mercilessly ridiculed and derided by the world when you were baptized? Did you know that when you were confirmed? When you stood up and said that you would rather die than to fall away from the faith?

Did you know that your friends and family might believe differently, that they might call you narrow minded, just some Bible-believing hick?

Did you know that your confession of faith would exclude you from a world of fleshly delight, from sleeping in on Sundays, your conscience unburdened of any guilty thoughts?

It's not easy when the tide of world opinion turns against you, when the shouts of "Hosanna!" change to "Crucify!" It's not easy when those around us pit us against "science" or "nature" or "fairness."

We certainly have our own bitter cups to drink from. It's hard to choke down the dregs of illness and death, disappointment and heartache that can come with this life. It's hard, but not impossible. Even unbelievers experience suffering in this life. But we have something else.

We have a promise. We have a covenant, a *new* covenant.

The world has its gods of fairness and being nice and living life to its "fullest." But all that leads to is death. All the good deeds in the world can't keep us alive. All the fairness and equality in the world can't forgive our sins, can't take away our guilt. We will still suffer. We will still die.

Jesus is different. Jesus is life. Jesus offers us the cup of salvation; Jesus baptizes us into his household. Our Father in heaven sent his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus marches on to the cross in order to save us, in order to serve us. Jesus enters into Jerusalem in order to be the High Priest who offers up the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. Jesus was born into this world to be that sacrifice, for without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

Our song is love unknown because we cannot fathom that kind of sacrifice. We cannot fathom the kind of love that loves to the point of suffering God's wrath for our sin—all the sin of the world, cosmically focused on one, poor, frail, broken human body. Mocked, spit upon, flogged; nailed to a cross; lifted up and gasping for breath. Unfairly, undeservedly, willingly.

Are we able to be baptized into the Baptism with which he is baptized? I hope so. For that Baptism baptizes us into his death, killing our sinful flesh. And that Baptism baptizes us also into his resurrection from the dead, giving us new bodily life in heaven.

Are we able to drink the cup that he drinks? I hope so. For he has taken away the sin and the punishment from us so that the cup we drink at this altar is his blood, shed for us for the forgiveness of sins, for our salvation and eternal life.

By grace, he comes to us by these means—not to lord it over us, but to serve us. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are brought to faith and sustained in it—not to lord it over one another, but to serve.

“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” (v 35) they said. But Jesus has taught us to pray, ***“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”*** (Matthew 6:10).

Because there has never been the kind of love that Jesus loves, and this is the place where we receive it—in the cup, in the font, in the promise. The world will never understand. Our flesh will fight us. Satan will rage at us. But Jesus will serve us in perfect love, to guide us through the suffering and temptations of this life, to lead us to paths of righteousness and holiness, so that we can face our own stingless death. He has already accomplished it, just as he promised. Amen