

You Will Be

Text: Mark 10:35-45

Hymn: "Christ, the Life of All the Living" (*LSB* 420)

It wasn't unreasonable of James and John to ask what they asked—to sit at the right hand and at the left of Jesus when He comes in His kingdom. First of all, it was a great expression of faith. They had true faith that Jesus would in fact sit at the head of the table at the coming of God's kingdom. They knew and believed Him to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the One sent to rule over God's kingdom. There weren't many people who had that faith. But James and John did.

Not only that, but they had been there from the beginning. The first call to follow Jesus that we know of came to Peter and immediately afterwards to James and John, Peter's business partners in that Galilean fishing business. James and John had been there from the beginning, and they had been singled out before anybody else, except Peter, to be disciples and apostles of Jesus.

Moreover, at all the important moments when Jesus asked both the crowds and even the disciples to step back—at the Mount of Transfiguration, in the room where He raised the daughter of Jairus, at the garden of Gethsemane—he only ever took three disciples with him: Peter, James, and John.

Finally, we might consider the fact that Jesus had promised the apostles they would sit at the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, and would sit in seats of honor at the coming feast in the kingdom of God. So for James and John to say, "Can we sit at the right and at the left?" i.e., in seats numbers one and two in order of honor, about the only person who might have had a bone to pick about it would have been Peter, who

was there from the beginning as well. But you can't have them all sitting in those seats, so who can blame them for wanting to call shotgun?

And let's also not forget that James and John were no worse than the rest of them. When this conversation reached the ears of the others, the ten didn't say, "Whatever makes James and John happy." No, they became indignant. How dare they get there first! We should have an equal chance to sit there as well! It's not fair; just because they were a little quicker off the mark!

Finally, I suspect that we wouldn't have been much better than those twelve in the same situation. What makes me think that? Because we are just the same. We are just as careful and preoccupied about guarding our own honor, our own reputation, our own standing. And the old Adam has this impressive ability to take the greatest of God's gifts and twist them into sinful ambition. You'll remember the ambition of our first parents, Adam and Eve, was self-promotion. "You shall be like God. You can do better if you just take things into your own hands and look after yourselves. You can rise up!"

So what does Jesus give to James and John? He gives them the privilege to be among the Twelve apostles, the heads of the tribes of Israel in the coming kingdom of God (Mt 19:28). Places of privilege over the patriarchs. And what is their response to this enormous gift of which they were in no way worthy? They use it for self-promotion!

How about us? Yes, we believe in Jesus, and He's going to be a great way for us to climb even higher. This explains the continual presence of conflict and strife and envy and jealousy and bickering and quarreling in the church at all times and in all places this side of the Second Coming. Take any era of Church history, the New Testament to our present day, any place from the famous churches of the old church to

the Our Redeemer Lutheran in Dallas, and this self-seeking, this asserting of what I want and what is good for me and how I am being regarded and what about me, what about me, what about me is constantly present. Because that is the fundamental and basic cry of the old Adam. This is what causes friendships to break up; this is what causes family conflict; this is what causes wars. What about me?

We have this wonderful expression nowadays. "Me time." Everybody needs a little bit of "me time." We can serve one another but only to a point and then we need to pamper ourselves. We need to learn to love ourselves a little more. I understand and even sympathize with such sentiments to an extent, but the need to learn to love ourselves better is a long way from being mankind's greatest need at this time.

Even in the face of this persistent and perennial sin that refuses to go away, Jesus remains our loving Savior. He could easily have said to James and John, "Guys, I've given you chance after chance. You've blown it again. This goes to show you haven't the foggiest. So, thank you very much for your time and attention, but no thank you," and then proceeded to find more suitable replacements, perhaps from among the Pharisees. He might have done as he did with Peter and said to James and John, "Get behind me, Satans!"

Instead, He asked them a simple question, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And those words, "We are able," arise from the same old Adam and are the source of every spiritual ill in the history of mankind. "We are able."

I don't need to tell *you* how *able* you actually are. "The cup that I drink, the baptism with which I am baptized." Now to share in Jesus' cup, to share in Jesus'

baptism, sounds like a tremendous privilege, as if He were saying, Are you able to share my trophies? Are you able to sit with me in my place of glory? And we would say, Of course we can! No problem! And this much is true: To share in anything that Jesus has *is* a tremendous privilege. But we are not *able* to do so. On the contrary, it must be *given* to us. So, Jesus says, "To sit at my right and on my left is *not mine to grant* but for whom it has been prepared." We are not ready for anything, but for God all things are possible and nothing is impossible.

What was the cup that Jesus was to drink? Scripture tells us in both the Old and the New Testament the cup that Jesus drank was the cup of God's wrath. That was the cup that Jesus was to drink, which leads to death. Jesus died because He came under God's wrath. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? "Yes, we are able," they said. Are you able to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? In fact, James and John had already been baptized with the same baptism that Jesus had been baptized with, the baptism of John the Baptist. What was that baptism? It was the anointing of Jesus for death. The baptism of sinners, the baptism of repentance. And when Jesus was baptized, He was baptized into His own death.

But, you see, the amazing thing is Jesus doesn't say, "Oh, you think you are so wonderful? Let me tell you another thing." Instead, He says the cup that I drink you *will* drink and the baptism with which I am baptized you *will* be baptized with, too, not because they were *able* but because it was *given* to them. This is what the Father had prepared for them. We are not able to do anything, but God sent Jesus Christ, specifically because we are *not able*, so that in Him we might not be *enabled* but *given* things. They did not take the cup. They did not take baptism. It was given to them.

What is the cup? What is the baptism? It was a cup of death and a baptism of death. But it was Jesus' death and that cup and that baptism are *given* to you and to me. We are baptized into Jesus' death. And we drink the cup of His death even here. "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

When we were called to follow Jesus, we too were called to die, to follow Jesus into death. And as it happens, James and John may have taken those seats at Jesus' right and left after all. Think about it. Of the Twelve apostles, James was the first to die. He was the first one to take his seat at the table. And after him all the apostles, one after another. Last of all was John. So if you think of Jesus' table being filled in order, James takes his seat first and John last. But by this time they no longer care, because what they now know and we will, too, one day, when we think and see with the mind and the eyes of Christ, is that our glory is not in our standing over and against one another. Our glory consists in sharing in Jesus' glory. And Jesus' glory is in His dying for us so that He might be raised for us.

At our baptism, we were baptized into Jesus' death, which brings with it the real possibility that the world will treat us the way it treated Jesus. But our glory is in the fact that we have thereby been adopted as God's children. We are called to live by faith in the death of Christ and live the life of Christ, and so also to live in the love of Christ, to share in the privilege of suffering and dying for others, bearing one another's burdens.

"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom" (Mk 10:45). He came to serve you. And since He is serving you, you no longer need to assert yourselves over others. You no longer need to guard your own

interests. God the Father gave you His only Son. “Will He not also, along with Him, freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). You have been delivered from all self-regard and self-promotion. You’ve been promoted by Christ to a place far higher than you were ever able to promote yourself. And you have been freed to serve as Christ served. What greater privilege is there? Not only to sit with Jesus but to live with Jesus, to work with Jesus, and to die with Jesus, confident we will one day also be raised with Jesus.

Pastor Brent McGuire
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church