

The Bethel Pulpit

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BETHEL

LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the web at www.bethel-madison.org

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Text: Mark 10:32-45

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Amen.

James and John come to Jesus looking for a yes, before they even ask the question. *Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.* How would you answer if your child came to you and asked, “Will you buy me whatever I want for Christmas?” Right away we are alerted that this is going to be a huge ask. If the ask is going to be for new underwear or socks, it wouldn’t start out with a question to prep us.

They said to Jesus, “*Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.*” Wow! It’s like a sixteen-year-old asking for a new sports car! *You do not know what you are asking.* Are you, at the age of 16, able to drive responsibly? No speeding, always attentive, no racing with your friends, always being safe. At 16, the thought that a new sports car will bring you popularity and friends. It will bring you glory with your peers.

Who doesn’t want glory? I looked up synonyms for glory - magnificent, splendor, beauty, grandeur. Even in the 1st century, as in the 21st century, the lure of power and glory ensnares us all.

Athletes are in a constant pursuit of glory. Remember the Green Bay Packers first game of the season. Aaron Rogers being carted off the field in the second quarter only to return and throw three touchdowns in the second half to come from behind and beat the Bears. Everyone was pouring glory out on Rogers and the team. Since then they have tied with the Vikings and lost to the Detroit Lions.

And Mason Crosby, one week fans calling for the team to cut him and the next week he kicks a field goal to win the game.

What sort of things do we long for that we think will bring us glory? Like the teenager with the sports car, how often do we search for glory in our possessions. Do we long for a bigger house in a better part of town? A return to what we perceive as our great and glory days? A promotion that will give us more status and money.

How is that working for you? Sure, it feels

good for a while, a great accomplishment that gets noticed and praised. But since it is all temporary we soon find ourselves on to the next bigger and better thing, eager for more splendor and grandeur.

We find ourselves as slaves to this glory seeking. We continue to chase down these temporary highs hoping they will satisfy us. Every once in a while, pausing to think, “There’s got to be more to life than this.” Earthly glory is fleeting.

In our gospel today, we hear for the third time Jesus foretelling of his suffering, death and resurrection. When things in the bible are repeated it means we are to take notice. And for the third time, the disciples still don’t get it. What is this raising from the dead that Jesus speaks of?

After the first pronouncement it was Peter who attempted to rebuke Jesus. The disciples and the crowd are told, “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*”

After the second pronouncement the disciples argued over who was the greatest. They are told, “*Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.*”

Now, the third time, we have James and John wanting seats of glory on the left and the right sides of Jesus. They hear of suffering and death, yet they see a royal scene of honor and power that they want a piece of. Perhaps they are remembering back in chapter 9 the Transfiguration moment with Elijah and Moses on the mountaintop and want to be with Jesus in glory.

As we will see at the end of Mark, the ones on his right and his left are the bandits who will be crucified alongside him. Once again, God creates a reversal of the expected order in our world.

When the others hear of their request they get angry. They are jealous and want a piece of the splendor for themselves. There is a rivalry brewing in the group as everyone is seeking glory to be the greatest. Again, Jesus must define greatness for them, “*whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.*”

This challenges our earthly expectations. World truth is fleeting. The truth of the god of love is eternal. We've bought into the lie of individuality that enslaves us. This lie that says I should be great at the expense of others.

God loves us and calls us to love one another with radical love. When we rest in the presence of God and believe in his eternal promises the desires of this world and the need to be great and glorious melt away.

When we live in the abundant promises of God there is no need to hoard our resources of food, possessions, and lovingkindness. No need to lord our power over others.

When we look in a mirror and see ourselves with all our flaws, perceived physical flaws on the outside and imagined flaws on the inside, we can see Jesus standing there beside us knowing all our flaws and covering us with His love.

We have our own repetition of thoughts that circulate over and over in our heads that society enforces on us. Telling us we're not worthy, that we need to be more. God wants us to replace these thoughts with the repetition of the knowledge that you are covered by God's inexhaustible love.

You are worthy. This Radical Love is for ALL!! The God of all creation created you. Let's put **these** thoughts on a loop in our head so they can burrow into our soul.

The rhetoric of our current culture seeks to amplify the fear and the desire for glory in our lives. But we can look to the gospel for freedom. The gospel of God's unconditional love for all through Jesus frees us. Frees us to care for one another. Frees us to listen and hear each other. Frees us to serve one another.

In a few minutes, together as has been done throughout the centuries and will be done around the world today, we will recite the Apostles' Creed. In the second article of this creed we will express our faith in Jesus Christ.

In the Small Catechism Martin Luther wrote this explanation, "*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being... This is most certainly true.*"

In a recent article in the Living Lutheran magazine Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton wrote,

"Here is pure grace. It is God's action, not ours. We don't have to—in fact, we cannot—do anything to save ourselves or the world. God has done it. So now what? So now we live, really live, in freedom and in service."

James and John don't understand the coming resurrection of Jesus. They have difficulty trusting in the gospel. But we, as Easter people, can live the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus' life, death and resurrection over all aspects of our lives. We can believe this. **Trust this.** Jesus' glory sets us free to serve.

God sent His son to be fully human and walk with us on this earth. His death and resurrection reconcile us to God. This leaves no us vs them, we are all one. The fullness of humanity is taken up into the fullness of Christ.

This removes every line of righteousness drawn. For whenever we draw lines between us and them, the very act of drawing the line puts us on the unrighteous side. We are called to show the love of God that transforms the universe.

We lack faithfulness when we put our trust in worldly things: money, possessions, leaders. Jesus' power doesn't come from being a tyrant and lording power over others. The Gospel shows us over and over that to be great is to be about servant-power.

We lack faith when we put our belief in ideology and not God. Trust in the triune God frees us from trusting in everything else that can't give us life.

The life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ persuades us to put our faith in the living God and frees us from bondage to untrustworthy, glory-seeking actions. God loves you beyond your comprehension, beyond your imagination. You can trust that.

God is faithful to God's promises. In this time of chaos and lack of trust, we can sing out the love and trust and faith of God. What God has done through Jesus, and continues to do through the Holy Spirit, changes the world forever.

We get to put our trust in the one who frees us from fleeting earthly glory. This freedom in Jesus sets **us** free to live out this servant-power. This is most certainly true. Amen