

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of March 29, 2009

The Glory of Christ is in Service to All (Mark 10:35-45)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark:

“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, we don't often find the words “glory and suffering” in the same sentence. Normally when we think of something that is glorious, we think something magnificent, something to be praised that is pleasant that is altogether beautiful. We say things like, “What a glorious sunset”, “What a glorious day”. The word glory also refers to achieving something great and earning prestige and honour. When an athlete wins an Olympic gold medal, for example, there is a certain kind of glory attached to it, fleeting though it is. To have glory also refers to being famous for some achievement or to have power and authority over something.

The disciples had ambition for this kind of glory. James and John in particular asked Jesus if they might sit at His right and His left hand in His glory. In other words, they wanted to be the ones who were closest to Him and to share in His glory. This is not a bad thing in itself. In fact, to be close to Jesus is the goal of our faith. The problem is, they did not know the meaning of His glory. As Jesus says, they did not know what they were asking.

Normally, the word ‘glory’ brings about images of God's presence as a fiery cloud and smoky pillar leading Israel through the desert in Moses' time. Or we think of Mount Sinai shaking in smoke and frightening the Israelites. Then there is Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as He showed the light of His glory and splendour to His disciples. Then there was the glory of the Lord that shined around the shepherds as the Angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus. For the brothers James and John, they thought of Jesus' glory in terms of having control and authority. They saw when He walked on water, when He stilled the storm, when He healed the sick and raised the dead. They wanted to have some of this power and authority for themselves.

The other disciples were a little annoyed at this request to say the least. “They were indignant” the text says. They were competitive. They once even had an argument as to which one was the greatest. They all wanted to be in control. They wanted to be the best. Once again, the problem was not their desire to share in Christ's glory; the problem was that they didn't understand that being in Jesus' glory does not mean being in control; it means sharing in His humility in this world.

When we think of someone with glory in life, we might think of a king with a palace of gold with a host of servants. But for Jesus, though He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, we see His ultimate glory in His love, in His service, and ultimately in His suffering and death for our sins.

Friends, the kingdom of heaven is not like the kingdom of the world. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven are not C.E.O.s they are servants. In our text, Jesus turns the value structure of our world on its head. Many consider the greatest in the world to be the strong, those who are in control. The disciples in our text argued over who was the greatest. They wanted to be recognized for their achievements. They thought glory was all about power, authority, and control. This is our natural tendency as well when we take a hard look at ourselves. There is a power struggle in many areas of our lives. We have a tendency to debate with our neighbour not necessarily to reach the truth of an issue or to edify our neighbour but to simply win an argument. In our sin we search for ways to win an argument for no other reason than to gain power and dominance over someone. In our misguided sin we think that putting ourselves on a pedestal and putting others down somehow makes us greater. But in reality it only makes us small.

Our Lord turns this kind of thinking upside down. He says, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all". A slave is the greatest? Certainly not in the eyes of the world though in God's view the greatest is the one with a servant's heart who looks for no reward, who is motivated simply by love.

The disciples' argument about who was the greatest then is a moot point. The greatest among them is Jesus Christ. He is servant of all. He is the Suffering Servant, as He is called in The fact that the Son of God serves us ought to dispel our pride. He is the greatest by far. He is the only One who is good.

His service to us ultimately was His mission in coming to earth. He came to give His life as a ransom for many, to be a servant to all by redeeming all people with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

If we think of this word 'ransom' it brings to mind a sort of kidnapping. When someone is kidnapped the kidnappers demand a ransom, an amount of money to release their captive. This was a trade, His life for ours. We had been captive to our sins, to death, and to the devil. But Christ has paid the price to set us free. This means we have eternal life. And He sets us free so we may be with Him in His glory.

Friends, Jesus' glory does not just refer to His power and authority. It also refers to His victory on the cross. Later, when St. John matured and wrote the Gospel of John He recorded the words of Christ in chapter 12, "Jesus answered them; "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." When we look at the shame of the cross, we see the glory of our Saviour as He wins salvation for us. Hidden under the crown of thorns is the crown of victory over sin and death and Satan. Hidden in the gruesome death of Christ is the blessing of eternal life for us.

The glory of Christ is hidden in the Words of Holy Scripture as well. These appear to be only words but they are life giving and life changing. They are words of eternal life. His glory comes to us through Baptism and Communion where He delivers to us the redemption He won for us on the cross.

Jesus is the ultimate servant. For not only does God serve us with clothes, food, home, friends, family and all our everyday things, Christ has given His whole life to ransom us and make us His own.

And in this life we come closest to Jesus when we serve others as He has served us. To be close to Jesus in His glory is to become a servant moulded and motivated by His love with no thought of reward or desire to receive any vainglory from the world. As our Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount, "When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Christ gave until it hurt. His love is so great that He served us until He suffered for us and even died for us. This is the full extent of His service in love. He drank from the cup of suffering to serve us with forgiveness and every blessing in the Heavenly Kingdom.

And friends, as His followers, as His disciples He calls us to share in His sufferings. This too is to share in His glory. Sometimes we may suffer for doing good but we have the assurance that our Lord Jesus, as the ultimate Suffering Servant Himself is with us and will sustain us and give us strength.

Indeed, there is glory in serving and even suffering for doing good. It is the only glory that matters. It is the glory we have in Jesus Christ as we share His life and work. This is the glory that leads to heavenly glory where there will be no more suffering or death or pain. For through the Suffering of the Servant Jesus we have the hope of glory forever. His service to you is victory and eternal life through the cross of His glory. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.