

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 29, a.D. 2009

Mark 10: 32 45

This is now the third time that our Lord foretells his death to his disciples. It is the last time. There are no more predictions of his death as He says, “We are going up to Jerusalem”. The Lord and his 12 disciples are already on the Jerusalem road that is buried with coats, squeezed by adoring people with palms and reaches its conclusion in the cross and resurrection.

Sometimes children have to be told more than three times before they hop to it. Often they are listening but their heads are so filled with other things such as captivating Television or chatting with friends online that needs to be finished first and crowd out any parental pleas to come for supper, clean the bedroom or else finish their homework.

Here the Lord Christ is speaking openly with his beloved disciples that He will die for the third time. He says that whoever wants to follow Him must also die with Him. But the disciples don't get it. If a cross awaits their Master than it will certainly also be the lot for those who follow Him. It's an obvious connection. No servant is above his master.

See however, what fills the heads of the disciples. First two of them who happened to be brothers nicknamed sons of thunder, James and John, are eager to grab the two top spots in the Kingdom. To sit at the King's right and left was more than appearance or prestige, it gave one access to the king's ears and so the King reserved these top spots for trusted confidants and top counselors in his court.

When the other 10 disciples heard what was going on, their jealousy grew hot, for they did not think it was fair. They too wanted a fair shot at getting the top spots. After all, who wants to end up last with the bottom spot?

Do such domestic squabbles sound familiar? Now when it comes to settling the disputes of who gets to sit where in the family of God, one would think that Jesus would simply decide it upon what is fair. But he is getting ready to suffer and die on the cross. His head is filled with bringing the kingdom of God to us and his heart is heavy with the sorrow of carrying his bloody cross to accomplish it. The squabble over who gets what is enough to make a grown man weep.

Jesus saves his weeping for Gethsemane's garden. Even he does not choose who gets to sit where. For he did not pick the two thieves crucified with him, one on his left and one on his right when he brought his glorious kingdom to us. But He died for them. Nor does he pick those seated with him when the whole world will be judged.

Are you worthy to be a part of his kingdom? Have you done enough to get in? Is your list of service to others long enough, distinguishing you as top servant, perhaps as James and John thought of themselves?

James was the first disciple to be killed because he followed Christ. John suffered much and drank the bitter cup as the Lord's own beloved disciple. But even such suffering and martyrdom could never be enough to bring anyone into God's kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is not a puzzle for you to solve. It does not follow the principles of man-made science nor lend itself to organizational charts. The Kingdom of God is in the things despised by men: in poverty, meekness, suffering, weakness, and in death. You cannot make it work because it succeeds by failing. It knows victory only through defeat. It is a vineyard of grace. Laborers are paid for work they did not perform. Murdering thieves are made into sons.

It all comes down to the death of the only sinless one among us, Jesus' death. His death judges you as sinless, forgiven and at peace with his heavenly father. The just for the unjust. The One who drank the father's bitter cup of wrath against all our sin.

Jesus speaks of it as giving His life as a ransom for many. The one who paid the ransom is the Ransomer. The price was his body and blood paid not to the devil but to the Father. Jesus gave His body and blood for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Now if you are judged by his death than you no longer live but Christ lives in you. You are dead to your old self. Gone is slavery to sin. You are crucified with Christ and He now lives in you. The life you live now is in Christ who loved you and gave himself for you.

Jesus gives you a clean slate and a good conscience so that all your nagging doubts about your sin are swallowed up. He assures you that God is not against you but for you. Even if Satan comes up with true accusations against you the Lord silences them with his body and his blood.

Now don't worry who gets top spot in the kingdom, such things are already chosen by the heavenly father. His only Son came to serve you not to be served. You are now free to walk with him on this Lenten journey and do the same, serving others, knowing that God's kingdom is one of grace and mercy, loved by God for Jesus' sake, always. Amen