

Mark 10:35-45
Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 17, 2024

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

Our text, “Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’ And they said to them, ‘We are able.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.’”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We could read this text in context with what comes *next* and contrast the disciples’ very elitist request with blind Bartimaeus’ very humble request. Yet, Jesus answers both requests with “What do you seek?” He is so merciful that, even when our requests/prayers are misguided (perhaps ‘elitist’), He still hears them and uses it as opportunity to gently conform our will to his will.

So this text isn’t really about whether the disciples’ will and request was “on target.” *Of course* it wasn’t: they’re sinners like the rest of us. Be bold in your prayer and your requests of God; just don’t be stubborn in expecting your will to be “on target”! And the Lord will use your prayer to conform your will to that which He knows is best for you.

So, instead of interpreting the request by comparing this text with what comes after it, we ought consider what comes immediately before it: Jesus, *for the third time*, foretells of his death. The contrasting to be done here is not with the disciples' will, but with their understanding of glory.

What is Jesus' glory? The disciples believe it's sitting upon the throne; He knows His glory is hidden in his suffering. While they keep trying to draw his attention to future glory, he keeps drawing their attention back to the cross, for there is where His glory is found, hidden within its shame.

In fact, think of their request to sit on his right and his left. *They* are thinking of glory. And, if we're not careful, we'll *also* immediately think of His glory. We'll say, "How mistaken they are!, *because* (we'll explain) when the Son of Man comes again in his glory, He will sit on his glorious throne and he will separate the sheep from the goats, the sheep on his right, and the goats on his left. They shouldn't want to sit on his *left*. Yes, they know not what they ask; it all makes sense now!"

True, we could think ahead to Christ's return, and we can show how mistaken the two disciples were to want to sit on his right and his left. But then, we would be equally mistaken... for, though the image of Christ's glorious return for judgment fits the wording quite well, and though it would show the disciples do not

know what they are asking, nevertheless it is not the only, nor the most proper, understanding of that to which Jesus is referring.

Remember, all of his focus is on his suffering. Immediately before our text, He has *for the third time* foretold of his suffering. This is his glory, even if it causes him to sweat great drops of blood in anguish – “Now is my soul troubled; and, what shall I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour! Father, glorify Your name.” And again, Jesus cries, “Father, glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You!”

And, if all his focus is on *this* hour, then the disciples are *more* off base than we think when they ask to sit on his right and on his left in his glory. And, we’re off base with them if we think that all our attention should go to his glorious *return*. No, the attention should go to the hidden glory of His cross; *there* is where it is true that, as Christ says, “to sit at my right and my left is not mine to give.” Think about that: it *IS* His to give/determine at his return for judgment! – *He’s* the one separating the sheep from the goats! But, it’s *not* his to give in the hour of his crucifixion. No, in *that* hour, Jesus says in Matthew’s version of this text, “it is for those for whom it has already been prepared *by my Father*.” Yes, the Father prepared the altar of sacrifice, and the Father gave the earthly governments to oversee the earthly punishment. And the Father knew who would occupy the seats to

Jesus' right and Jesus' left, just as Mark's gospel (this same gospel account from which our text comes) records His passion this way, "And with him, they crucified two robbers, *one on his right and one on his left*" (15:27).

Ah, now it makes sense... those seats were not his to give, for Isaiah's prophecy had already said, "And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death." Yes, his tomb was that owned by a rich man, his cross stationed between the wicked on his right and on his left.

Now then, we refocus to see this entire text in light of Christ's crucifixion, for that is his glory *as Messiah*. So, in refocusing, for example, we must see that it is gentile-ish of us, it is the stuff of the unbeliever, to seek glory in *this* world and to lord it over our enemies... but rather, we ought live lives of service to our neighbor, as our Lord has done before us. Again, it is gentile-ish of us, the stuff of the unbeliever, to believe that the theology of worship is about creating a glorious spectacle to earn God's favor, rather than humbly coming before the altar of God and being served forgiveness and life by the Son of Man who came to lay down his life as a ransom, not that He might *be* served, but *serve* ... serve His ransoming sacrifice's benefits to His penitent people.

And again, reading this text through the lens of His cross means we must learn to understand rightly what it means to share in Christ's baptism and to drink the cup from which He drinks. Consider those words of the text:

"You will drink the cup from which I drink." Jesus calls his suffering "his cup" – "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." And he then tells James and John they will drink from this cup. Some would say it speaks to their martyrdom: but John was not martyred, but died in old age. Moreover, whether martyrdom or even exile, their suffering was not what joined them to Christ's death. The disciples are no more joined to Christ's death than you are, and you are no less joined to Christ's death than are the disciples – so it can't be determined by an individual's sufferings.

What joins you to Christ's death? Is it not being baptized *into* Christ's death, as Paul teaches: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried with him by baptism into his death."

And, if we are, by baptism, sharing in the baptism with which he was baptized, then is it not also true for partaking of his cup of suffering? "Can you drink from the cup of which I am about to drink? – You *will* drink from it," he tells them... but he also tells *you*... not because you are attached to his death by your own cup of suffering; you are attached to his death by the benefits poured

out for you in the cup that carries the fruits of His suffering. Yes, the Scriptures call it “the cup of salvation” and “the cup of blessing”... which it truly is precisely because it forever carries and distributes the fruits of His suffering.

When one asks *why* Jesus instituted the Holy Supper with a common cup, one cup for each meal, from which all would drink – “why would that be of any importance to Jesus?” – this text is the answer. “Are you able to drink the cup from which I drink?” He himself answers: “You *will* drink from the cup I drink...” Yes, He has made it so. He suffered, that He might pour out the benefit, saying to each of the disciples, and to every subsequent generation of the Church, “Drink out of it (that’s the simple Greek), all of you, this cup is the new testament in my blood... on your behalf, for the forgiveness of sins.” And, if that was the cup of His death, then it is the cup of our blessing, the cup of salvation.

Now, you say, “But, Pastor, we have the benefits in the *blood*! We don’t need to highlight the vessel!” But, the *blood* gives us the benefit. The *cup* ties us to the suffering; it reminds us that partaking of Christ *is our glory* in this world; in everything else we ought expect suffering... that is life at the foot of the cross, not only its benefits poured out in the water and blood, but its tie to

Christ's suffering – the tie by the baptismal **act** and the **cup** shared.

It is time that we (not specifically Calvary Lutheran Church, but confessional Lutheranism throughout our land) give up the uniquely American notion that the common cup was simply a thoughtlessly used vessel – a momentary *given* (based on available tools in the upper room) - of transporting a memorial wine to the mouth... that, if Jesus was *really* thinking about it, he would have used other means. Or, because he 'obviously' *wasn't* thinking about it, we ought claim Christian freedom to choose to use other means... whether intinction, individual cups, or (why not?) straws.

But, was Jesus not mindful of this detail? Did he not even know the room that was to be prepared that night?... and the donkey to be used for the Palm Sunday processional? And that room and donkey aren't even part of his lasting covenant to His Church!

No, the Lord does not do things by accident or without putting much thought into it. We do well to again recognize that the cup we bless is, St Paul says, *participation in* the blood of Christ: "Are you able to drink the cup of which I drink?... The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism I am baptized you will be baptized." Yes, baptized into his death; sharing the cup

that pours out the blood of His suffering. We must acknowledge anew that there's a beautiful and divine purpose for which Jesus says in the Words of Institution, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Drink of it, all of you." There is only **one suffering** for sins, so **one cup** to share that salvation. This is why the chalice has always been adorned in great beauty, not a carpenter's cup, but the finest cup a congregation can buy – for it properly locates Christ's glory in His fervent desire to share the benefits of the cup of His suffering with you, just as it is located in His fervent desire to share the benefits of His baptism into death with you.

Yes, in baptism, you are tied to Christ's death. In the cup from which you drink, you are tied to his suffering... or, as St Paul says it, "As often as you... drink the cup, you *proclaim the Lord's death* until he comes." And when you fear dying a death like his, you may rejoice in your baptism. And when you suffer like your Christ before you – hated by the world, the devil, your own sinful nature – you may rejoice in sharing the cup of His salvation. He says you will suffer like him, that you may share in glory with him. You die with him, that you may share in the resurrection with him. Yes, his glory and his suffering are – so to speak – one and the same, aren't they? He glories in His suffering because His suffering leads to our glory; His cross is His hidden glory leading to His unveiled glory. Thus, what joy in being baptized into the baptism

with which he was baptized; what joy in drinking from the cup of the blood of His suffering poured out for you.

When the church has ignored such teaching for so long out of germophobia, or explaining it away as “Roman Catholic” or as a mere custom that can be changed on a whim as a matter of Christian freedom... when the church has acted in such ways for a century, subtly teaching the whole household by action where it neglects to teach by *Word*, it’s understandably difficult (we can patiently sympathize) ... understandably difficult for the children of the household to change the actions they’ve learned from the heads of household for 100 years. We need not fear Christ has withheld His gifts or been anything but merciful just because we have learned to receive them in the manner we have erroneously been taught to do.

But where our practice is slow in appreciating, our doctrine cannot be. We do poorly to deny and explain away the simple Word of Scripture – “Drink of it, all of you” (yes, drink the cup that gives you participation in Christ’s blood and gives you a share in his suffering) – we can’t explain that away just because it doesn’t match our comfort zone or “the way we’ve always done things.” And we do well to humbly admit that we need God to be merciful and patient with us, for we in our weakness cling to a

practice inconsistent with – or at least poorly confessing – His one cup of suffering for our salvation.

Yes, we ought cherish and glory in that which Jesus glories in... He glories in His suffering, and He glories that you are baptized into that sacrificial death and drink of His salvation. For in these Sacraments you are most intimately tied to him... not by being placed on his right and left as thieves, nor by presumptively seeking glory not reserved for you, but by being heirs of the benefits of his cross, to be separated (on that last day) to His right with the sheep of his fold when the Son of Man judges the nations, and – as heirs – to share with Him in the banquet of Mt Zion that never ends.

Thus, why seek vainly after worldly glory, when you have – hidden in the cross and shared in its sacramental fruits pouring from Christ's side – you have the veiled glory of heaven, the veiled glory of the Church, the veiled glory of Christ himself. For the Son of Man came to give up his life as a ransom for many, and He has done that... and has taken it up again, not to be served, but to serve... to divinely share with you the inherited life of Baptism into His death and the cup of salvation blessed with the blood of His suffering.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son

And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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