

Do You Wonder?
Sunday Lent 5, Year B
Jeremiah 31: 31 – 34; Hebrews 5: 1 – 10; Mark 10: 32 – 45
March 21, 2021

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

We want a kingdom of glory, not a kingdom of suffering. We want pleasure, not pain. We want bliss and blessing, not chaos and cursing. We want all the goods without any of the work.

Ideally, that is how things would go. We would have servants, and they would come and tend to our every need. We would have a driver, a maid, a chef, a gardener, a tailor... all at our disposal.

In fact, we envy and are jealous of those who do have those things. We always want more. It is difficult for us to be content. To take what the Lord has given us. Instead, we think we deserve more.

It is in our nature to want to have the easy life.

Jesus' disciples and good friends, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, want the same thing. They ask Jesus to be at His right and left hand. These were positions of power and great influence. It was what Joseph was to Pharaoh in the Old Testament.

They figured that if Jesus was going to take over as king of Israel, kick out the Romans, bring in a time of peace...well, then...they wanted a piece of that. A nice big, juicy piece of the pie.

The sadly interesting thing about their question is when they ask it. They don't ask it when Jesus was transfigured, and it looks like He could do anything. No, it comes after Jesus tells them that He is going to be beaten, spat on, mocked, flogged and murdered.

Now, He does mention that after three days he will rise. Which, to me, would seemingly draw some really big questions. Murdered then rise from the dead? That sounds freaky. I've seen some of those movies... doesn't sound good. But, they don't ask Him about that.

But, instead of asking any questions about that, they go straight to, "Hey Jesus, what about us? Can we get promotions?"

Jesus then, in good rabbinic fashion, questions them in return. "*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?*" (Mark 10:38).

Now, this requires us to pause a moment. Because, these two men seem to come back quickly with a, "*We are able.*"

But, the cup Jesus is speaking of isn't a cup of tea. And the baptism isn't a simple washing.

Instead, the "cup" meant wrath. Isaiah speaks of the cup of wrath (Is. 51:17). And Jesus, also, speaks of the cup of wrath, while in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done*" (Luke 22:42).

These men would be baptized with the baptism of Jesus. But, don't necessarily think of the baptism you have already had; the rite and ritual in the church. Instead, think of what the word baptism means; washing, cleansing. Jesus' washing is the humiliation, scourging, and removal of any semblance of pride and worth. It is being emptied, washed through...

These men would drink from the same cup as Jesus. All the Apostles would. Suffering, persecution, hate, humiliation... that is what is in store for the Christian.

Yes, EVERY Christian. Suffering is part of the Christian life. Persecution, mockery, spit in the face... And, just like Apostles, we count it as a blessing to suffer as our Lord suffered. We should be so fortunate.

But, that is not what we want. We want our best life now. We want ease of living. We want everyone to like us. We want all the goods this world has to offer. We want everything the devil offered Jesus during His forty days in the wilderness. All of which Jesus declined, and continued in His suffering. So, during these forty days of Lent, we too fast and pray. We, too, share in our Lord's suffering, in some small part, remembering our mortality, and constantly, just like He did, looking up toward heaven for our help.

James and John will learn this. Later on, they will learn this. Just as you and I will learn this, if we haven't already.

James and John wanted to be on Jesus left and right, but Jesus tells them that it is not for Him to give that assignment. Those spots had already been prepared. Our Heavenly Father gets to make that determination.

Jesus had just told the disciples that He was heading toward His death. And, we know that all of His disciples would flee in fear, grief, and sorrow. Except one. John would stay behind. He would be at the foot of Jesus' cross as Jesus gasped for breath.

John would stand right next to Jesus' mother, Mary. Jesus would give to Him the responsibility of caring for Mary.

Yet, I wonder if John remembered his request as He stared up at Jesus beaten, bloodied and bruised body. I wonder if the glory he thought he would have disappeared as he watched the blood streaming down Jesus face from the punctures of the thorns and the blood spilling from His hands and feet because of the nails.

I wonder if John looked up and saw that there were two thieves on either side of Jesus. One on the right and one on the left. One in his place and one in the place of his brother. I wonder if he then understood what it meant to drink the cup of Jesus and to be washed as He was.

I wonder if the gravity of that moment pushed him to his knees as he was baptized in his own tears. I wonder if his heart began to swell as he realized the immense love and mercy His Lord had extended to him.

I wonder... I wonder if... I wonder if you do, too. Do you see yourself in their place? Do you see yourself condemned to die the excruciating death of a violent criminal? Do you see yourself ridiculed, mocked, naked and ashamed? Do you see yourself on display in the public eye for all to look upon you with disgust, hate, and displeasure?

I wonder if you know what it means to drink from His cup, to be baptized like Him?

If you are like me... you don't. If you are like me... you don't get it. You don't understand it. But, if you are like me, you continue to grow. You continue to understand. Just like the Apostles... Just like James and John.

St. John wrote, "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13).

St. Paul wrote, "*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8).

Do you wonder?

Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.