

## The Fifth Sunday of Lent

### Text: Mark 10:32-45

<sup>32</sup>They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. <sup>33</sup>“We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, <sup>34</sup>who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

<sup>35</sup>Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” <sup>36</sup>“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. <sup>37</sup>They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” <sup>38</sup>“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” <sup>39</sup>“We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, <sup>40</sup>but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.” <sup>41</sup>When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. <sup>42</sup>Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup>Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup>For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

### Theme: Are You Sure that You Want to become Great?

In the beginning of our text Jesus is leading the way to Jerusalem. It says that the disciples were astonished and those who were with Him were afraid. I believe that the people who were afraid looked at the situation more realistic than the disciples. They all knew that something big was going to happen at Jerusalem. The disciples believed that Jesus was going there to receive His glory. They had a picture in their minds of Jesus high on a throne with 12 glorious thrones around Him on which they sat. Before anyone else asked, James and John wanted to be sure that they would receive the places of honor, so they came up to the Lord and asked for the seats at His right and left hands. Jesus answered by asking them and us whether we are sure that we want to become great.

I. In the world being great means to knock everyone above you down until you are standing gloriously at the top.

When I was in grade school, my favorite game was “King of the Hill.” Our school parking lot had huge mounds of snow mixed with gravel. At recess we ran to those mounds. We would push each other down until you would gloriously be on top of the hill. There was no better feeling than being on top of the hill after conquering all of your classmates. The only problem was that as soon as you were on the top, everyone else was coming at you to knock you down.

That’s how the world looks at greatness. Think of the ancient empires. In Bible class we have been looking at the book of Daniel. Much of the book is about the progression of empires until the coming of Christ. There were the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and then the Romans. Every time

that one empire was on top, the others would try to topple them. We see the same kind of thing at work, school, and even in our families. We try to knock each other down, so that we can stand in glory. We desire to stand on top so that we can be served and honored. James and John were looking at greatness from the world's perspective. Their desire for it only made the others angry at them because they also wanted to be on top.

## II. Greatness in the kingdom of God isn't like that at all.

Those who are great in the kingdom of God are humble. Jesus asked James and John whether they could drink the cup that He was about to drink. They eagerly answered, "Yes, we can!" Contrast that with Jesus who prayed at Gethsemane, "*Abba, Father, everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.*" (Mk 14:36) Jesus did not go to Jerusalem with great pomp. He entered the city humbly on a donkey. He dreaded the cross. While He was on the cross, He suffered horribly. Jesus knew that there was no other way, so He led His disciples to Jerusalem. Just before our text we see just how exactly Jesus knew what was going to happen. He said, "*We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles, who will mock Him and spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him. Three days later He will rise.*" Christ was so humble that He was willing to go through all of that in order to save us.

As I think of great leaders in the Bible and the history of the Christian church, they were also humble. Numbers 12:3 says about Moses, "*Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.*" He never desired to lead the Israelites out of Egypt; yet, God wouldn't take "no" for an answer. None of the prophets desired their office. They all made excuses. They didn't feel worthy of the calling that God had given to them, but they humbly fulfilled the calling that they had. King David once prayed, "*Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that You have brought me this far?*" (2 Sam 7:18) I think of men like Martin Luther who wanted to be nothing more than a monk, whom God called to restore the pure preaching of the Gospel. The Lord never uses those who think that He needs them. He uses those who wonder how they can accomplish the tasks that He gives them. They set about their calling with anxiety and fear and end up amazed that God could use them despite their weakness, sins, and the crosses that they bore.

Those who are great in God's kingdom serve. Jesus told His apostles, "*You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.*" Christ came into this world for our good. He used His authority to serve us. He did that as He healed the sick and cast out demons, even when He was tired and worn out. He gave a vivid example of that service the night of the Passover when He got down on His knees and began to wash the disciples' feet. But the height of His service came when He gave His life as a ransom for us all. The disciples were expecting Him to be lifted up when they came to Jerusalem. Ironically, they were right. He was lifted up on a cross. He suffered as He bore the punishment of our sins. We rebelled against Him. Yet, He died for us and our salvation. Every part of His ministry was service in order to save us and rescue us from the guilt of our sins. Even now after His resurrection, all authority has been given to Him. He rules all things from the right hand of the Father. What does He do with that authority? He uses it to serve us. He rules

all things for the good of His people.

His people serve as He has served us. James and John wanted to have authority, so that they could serve, but those to whom God gives authority are called to serve. When King Solomon's son Rehoboam began His rule, the people asked him to lighten up on the forced labor and taxes. His older advisers said, *"If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."* (2 Ki 12:7) But He didn't listen to that advice. He wanted to show the people who was boss. Because of His foolishness, the kingdom of Israel was split in two.

There are many exhortations in the Bible to those whom God gives authority to serve as Christ has served us. John the Baptist told the soldiers not to extort money from people and tax collectors not to cheat. Paul calls on masters at that time to treat their slaves with respect and not to threaten them. (Eph 6:9) He tells Fathers not to exasperate their children; instead to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4) Peter writes these words to pastors, <sup>2</sup>*"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; <sup>3</sup>not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."* (1 Peter 5) But the best exhortation of service is when Paul calls the husband the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. Then he goes on to explain what this means in Ephesians 5, *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy...In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies."* Husbands are called to love their wife by serving them and doing everything for their good. Wherever God gives us authority in life, be it at home, at work, in school, in the church or even in the government, He calls us to serve those whom He has placed under our authority.

At first this might make us have second thoughts about being great. If being great means that God expects us to bear crosses and serve, we might want to forget the whole idea. But when we think of how much our Lord suffered for us and how much He serves us yet today, we cannot help but praise and thank Him for all that He has done for us. The ransom He paid with His own blood is the greatest gift that anyone has ever given to us. When we have received that gift, we cannot help but desire to serve and love each other as He has served and loved us. (Gal 5:13)

Amen.

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