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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 21, 2018
22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 53:9-16, Hebrews 4:9-16

Hymns: 748; 421; 307; 413:5,6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶ And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

³⁷ They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

³⁹ They said to Him, "We are able."

So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized;

⁴⁰ but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared."

⁴¹ And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. ⁴² But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Unfounded expectations

There's a public service spot that calls for us to "feed the pig." Its message is that we need to be saving at least a little throughout life. We can't go through life expecting that a nest egg for emergencies or for retirement will suddenly just fall in our laps. It portrays such expectations of having an unknown relative leaving you a fortune in his will as being irresponsible and foolish. Expectations need to have a basis in reality. However we all suffer from misguided expectations from time to time. The Charles Dickens classic novel *Great Expectations* is a story of such an unknown benefactor who will give the main character such an inheritance.

The question I would put before us is: do we have such a benefactor who gives us cause to hold onto great expectations of a grand life coming to us? In our text we see how the disciples possessed misguided expectations of earthly glory in Jesus. The disciples did indeed possess --

THEME: Great Expectations of Discipleship.

It started with James and John, the sons of Zebedee, the fisherman. It may have started with them but before long it becomes evident that it spread throughout the twelve disciples. What spread you might ask? The answer is --

I. Vain Expectations of Discipleship.

I'm afraid there are several lessons to draw from this event that are negative lessons, in other words examples we should be careful not to follow. Let's review again what happened.

Mark 10: 35-40 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶ And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for

you?” ³⁷ They said to Him, “Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.”

³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹ They said to Him, “We are able.”

So Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized;

⁴⁰ but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared.”

James and John, along with Peter had enjoyed a rather favored status with Jesus. He included them in certain events that the rest of the twelve were not privy to. Perhaps that’s what instigated this prideful event. It appears that they thought of themselves more highly than they ought. (Romans 12:3) They approached Jesus with a request that they felt their position with Him merited. In Matthew’s gospel it is recorded that they actually had their mother, Jesus’ aunt, put the proposition forward that these two sons of hers merited a special position in Jesus’ kingdom, one on His right hand and the other on His left. They were suggesting, actually insisting that their close relationship to Jesus should qualify them for positions of power and influence and honor. They actually wanted Jesus to grant their request before telling Him what they desired.

It is all too easy for us sinful mortals to overestimate our own importance and accomplishments. This, I am afraid is also true in regard to our position in the kingdom of God, for while it is indeed possible for us to blunder and be a hindrance to the gospel, even when we do our best and perhaps make a greater effort in witnessing to the truth of Jesus to this world, we are never the power that saves. It is always the Holy Spirit working through the gospel.

In Jesus’ response He was quick to point out to the brothers that they did not realize what they asked. Oh, but they were so sure that they did! When Jesus asked them if they were ready to drink the cup which Jesus was about to drink, to be baptized with the baptism Jesus was about to endure they exclaimed, “We are able!” They thought themselves ready to go forward with Jesus no matter where that led, but they still had no understanding of the cross that

lay before Jesus. That cup and that baptism that lay before Jesus was of course referencing His bitter sufferings and death.

Their response to Jesus reveals exactly how foolish **we** can be. That answer filled with bravado, “We are able,” is so revealing of the heart of man. Yes, they thought they had the necessary strength within themselves to face whatever discipleship might bring! Ah, such vanity! The kind of vanity of which we are all guilty. It shows up in us more often when we place ourselves in the way of temptation. We are so confident that we have the strength to remain faithful and even face derision if need be, so we blunder forward into this world’s arena where the devil calls the shots and we are the targets of trial and temptation that we are not ready to endure, and at times we stumble. Lord save us from ourselves and our prideful vanity.

Perhaps, our concern is that we would answer Jesus with a firm “No, I can’t face that.” This answer is actually no better. It still reveals our lack of understanding that our strength comes from the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. If such an answer lies in our hearts and minds it demonstrates our need to hear the gospel regularly, and to meditate upon it faithfully.

Jesus, knowing all things, not only that which lay before Him in His passion, but also that which lay before James and John, assured them that they would indeed suffer for His name’s sake. It would not be long after Jesus’ ascension into heaven that wicked King Herod would arrest and then behead the Apostle James who was among those who refused to stop testifying to the people concerning Jesus. Many years later John too would suffer for Jesus’ sake ending his days in exile on the island of Patmos. However at the time that they asked this immense favor of the Lord they had no real concept of what discipleship would entail down the road. When these things came to pass they leaned upon the Lord for their strength.

Ultimately Jesus’ answer was that their request was not His to grant, but was reserved for those for whom it was prepared. Well the rest of the twelve realized something was going on with James and John, and when it came to light they were unhappy.

Mark 10:41 And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.

It is contagious you know, this vain expectation of what discipleship should bring. That is what we see in the other ten disciples. They were upset that James and John thought themselves better than the rest. This had come up before, and Jesus had set a child in their midst to teach them a lesson in humility and discipleship. The same jealousy would rear its ugly head **again** on Maundy Thursday evening. Jesus would need to repeat the lesson.

What does that tell us but that it happens more often in our lives than we recognize. We can see the shortcomings of others, but not of ourselves. We are so fortunate to be better than others and therefore (even if we don't say it out loud) more deserving of recognition from Jesus.

And again that is not the only way vain expectations come to light. In American Christianity it is fairly common for so called "evangelical preachers" to present a message of "glory theology." If you are faithful to the Lord, if you send in a generous contribution, if you are a really good disciple, then you may expect honor and prosperity in this life. Many people get so wrapped up in this kind of theology that when earthly prosperity doesn't come, but instead tribulation comes their way, the conclusion is that they failed the Lord, and their faith in the Lord is undermined when they need Him most.

There is something far greater than the baubles this world can offer, but it doesn't come with the glitz and fanfare of this world. Jesus presents us with --

II. Expectations of Service and Suffering.

Jesus addressed the matter with His disciples.

Mark 10: 42-45 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ And whoever

of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Jesus made it clear that what the disciples were grappling with was the way of the world. Yes, at times the world can make it sound like they are only in it for others, even calling themselves “public servants,” but in the end one bows the knee before the powerful, the rich, the influential in this world or one may be crushed by them. It is not to be like that among us, brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus encourages a very different spirit among His disciples, not only the twelve but with us also. If you are gifted by the Lord, if you desire to serve the Lord as powerfully as you might, then be ready to serve your brother with humility. Like a slave we ought to submit our will not only to the Lord’s will, but to the will of those whom we serve, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Don’t expect discipleship to be a walk through the park. Just the opposite is going to be true. There will be tribulation along the way. Even as Christ suffered so we also ought to expect sufferings for His name’s sake. In fact not so much later, when the disciples had received the Spirit and then proclaimed the name of Christ in the temple, they were beaten with rods. You know that had to hurt, hurt really bad. They didn’t respond by keeping silent, or feeling sorry for themselves, or thinking, “What did we get ourselves into?” No, “*they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*” (Acts 5:41)

If the thought of that coming into your life scares you a little, or maybe more than a little, that’s okay. It is simply a matter of fact that our strength is not great enough to face that trial today, but when the time comes the Spirit of our God will strengthen us, as He does with all the trials, tribulations and temptations of life. In the end the Lord will use both our service, and our tribulations to draw us closer to Him, to draw our strength from Him. It is as the psalmist wrote:

Psalms 34:19 Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous,
But the Lord delivers him out of them all.

We should expect the world to react to us just as they reacted to Jesus. And we also should desire this gift that we might be like-minded to the Lord Jesus Himself. After all He did not come to acquire glory and honor for Himself. He possessed all glory, power, might, and dominion since before the world began. He came to secure for us great expectations, the greatest of expectations:

III. Expectations of Salvation.

Think about the wonder of what Jesus says here at the conclusion of our text: “**even** the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Jesus was not born into the world to accrue some benefit to Himself. He was born into this world to serve. This is evident in all Jesus said and all that He did. He served the poor and the downtrodden, those oppressed by sin and the curse and corruption that sin has brought into the world. He served them selflessly preaching the gospel and healing their diseases. That all led up to the greatest act of service and sacrifice, that Jesus gave His life a ransom for many. That’s what was necessary to save a world full of sinners. We need to understand that this is exactly what Jesus was saying. In giving His life a ransom for many one should not understand that this means some but not all. The force of this expression is that Jesus gave His life as payment for the souls of all the masses of people out there in the world. **He died for all!** That being said we must conclude, He died for **me**, to pay the ransom price for **my** soul.

This is the foundation of our great expectations. Jesus died that I might be reconciled to God, that you and I together with all believers might be made heirs of heavenly glory. We do not come to this hope or this expectation on our own. The Spirit of God that has placed this expectation of heavenly glory in our hearts and minds through the gospel. We read in Paul’s epistle to the Romans:

Romans 8:16-17 “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Yes, the Spirit makes it clear that our faith is not about this life being a walk through a rose garden. In this life we may suffer both tribulation and persecution, but what is that in the face of what awaits us, what the Lord tells us to expect? We shall be glorified together with Christ!

May the Spirit establish these great and true expectations in our hearts that we may live for Christ in service to our neighbor and in hope of everlasting life!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.