



## **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**March 18, 2018 – 9:00 a.m.**

**Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor**

**Theme: ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DRINK *THIS* CUP?**

### **Sermon Text: Mark 10:32-45 (NIV)**

<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 delivered over to the chief priests and the 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.”

We’ll start today by examining one of Zebedee’s sons, John the Evangelist. He wrote the Gospel and the three letters that bear his name, and the book of Revelation. Typically, John is depicted as an eagle, an association that comes from Ezekiel’s vision of the four living creatures in heaven: the ox, the man, the lamb and the eagle. But another symbol for St. John is a chalice with a serpent inside. The symbol is derived from Jesus’ words in our sermon text. After Jesus explained in detail the suffering He’d undergo in the days ahead, including His death by crucifixion as well as His triumphant resurrection three days later,

we're told that **“James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask.’ ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked. They replied, ‘Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.’ ‘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?’”**

### ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DRINK *THIS* CUP?

John and James both reply, **“We can.”** John is depicted by the symbol of a chalice with a serpent in it. The serpent represents Satan, the old evil Foe, who leads believers like James and John—and you and me—to boast about our allegiance to Jesus in the face of impending suffering for His sake, only to run and hide when His enemies—in whatever form they take—attack us and our faith in Him just like James, John and the rest of the Twelve scattered like rats leaving a sinking ship when Jesus’ enemies came to arrest Him in Gethsemane. There Jesus prayed, **“Abba, Father. Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will”** (Mark 14:36). It’s not as if Jesus was *unwilling* to drink the cup of suffering and death. No, He’d need to drain it to its bitter dregs in order to fulfill the mission He’d taken on our flesh and blood to complete. He was conceding that His human nature recoiled at the thought of death, just as ours does. Death is an unwelcome intruder that entered Creation only after the fall.

Yet Jesus had never done one thing to soil His perfect soul. So His divine nature struggled with the awful load of sin He’d carry to the cross. It’s as if Christ is asking, **“Must I tarnish my sinless nature?”** We can’t even begin to understand the significance of this struggle. In a very weak illustration we might speak of a bride on the way to her wedding jumping into a filthy pig pen to save a child from being trampled by ravenous pigs. She wouldn’t *want* to soil her pristine wedding dress, but she’d be *willing* to if it was the only way to save that poor child from certain death. So Christ was willing to do His Father’s bidding if it was the only way to save our fallen race. St. Paul helps us get the meaning of Jesus’ plea when he writes that **“God made [Jesus], who had no sin, to be sin for us”** (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus is marching toward the cross. His trek began ere the dawn of time. It was set in motion when Jesus was conceived by the Spirit in the Virgin Mary’s womb and His eternal deity joined with our human nature to form a truly unique being: fully God and fully man in one Person: **“Immanuel”—“God with us”** (Matt. 1:23). Born in Bethlehem, exiled in Egypt, raised in Nazareth, baptized by John in the Jordan River, Jesus made the lame walk, the deaf hear and the blind see. He cast out demons and even raised the dead.

He masterfully employed familiar, every-day experiences in His parables to cut to the heart of God’s will and impart deep theological truths. Jesus was on a death march. He led the pack and set the pace. And those lagging behind weren’t sure what His hurry was. **“Why so determined, Jesus? Why so eager to enter your enemies’ stronghold?”** they must’ve mused.

Jesus’ disciples remained clueless about His ultimate goal, albeit He had explicitly detailed it for them at least three times. I’m pretty sure that the disciples *chose* not to grasp Jesus’ gruesome forecast. They didn’t want to hear word one about His imminent death. Their hearts were set on the glory of being members of Jesus’ royal court as he reigned as a mighty monarch ala kings David and Solomon. Like many of their countrymen, the disciples hoped for a political “savior” who would rid the land of the Romans and restore Israel to the prominence it’d once enjoyed. **“James and John”** simply beat the others to the punch when they asked Jesus: **“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”** Jesus instantly turns their attention back to the **“cup”** of His suffering and death.

It seems so seedy and devious, elbowing your way to the top like the **“Zebedee”** brothers did that day, doesn't it? It's the exact opposite of showing sacrificial love for others—even for their enemies—like Jesus had commanded them to do; never mind their close friends. It's no surprise, then, that Mark reports: **“When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.”** They were mad—mostly at themselves—that the Zebedee boys had gotten their oars in the water before they did! Like the rest of us sinners, they craved the limelight for their own accomplishments and for the fact that they were members of “The Miracle Man's” posse. They knew who they were: they were the crew of the Christ! All the buzz in Israel—good, bad or indifferent—centered on their Master, Jesus. His words and works were the cause célèbre of their day!

But we're no different. We're like siblings pushing each other aside as they clamor for a parent's full attention. **“Hey, Mom, check me out!” “Hey, Dad, over here!”** we shout. But do we honestly want Jesus to examine us for who we truly are deep down inside? Do we really long for His *unbridled* critique? Do we actually pine for His approval apart from a thorough examination of our motives? Can we answer, “Yes,” “yes” and “yes” to those asks? Or does our conscience compel us to reply with three “No's”?

We're not immune to the disciples' “Me First” attitude. We want to give credit where credit is due, and most of the time we feel that we're due the credit for whatever good comes our way in life. Our narcissistic nature craves attention, even if that means we have to push aside a brother or sister in Christ to get it. It's not just us. It's everyone! We all have an innate need for positive reinforcement. For example, your obnoxious coworker who publicly praises your boss but is always bad-mouthing him in private—well, he gets “your” promotion at the office. Or, you work with a peer on a school project. You do most of the work, but she takes most of the credit. We make it all about “us” whenever we talk over others, steal their thunder or create undue drama that focuses attention on us. Like the disciples, we stop seeing others as people to love and start seeing them as objects to be used for our advantage. Users use. And we're all users in our sinful hearts.

It oughta be all about Jesus. His will—*not ours*—should be our #1 priority! He reveals who He is and the true nature of His work in our text: **“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 to give his life as a ransom for many.”** To put others' welfare above our own is the pathway to greatness in Christ's kingdom. Gratitude in servitude not self-serving platitude is the attitude God seeks. Nowhere is that more evident than when God's Son **“gave his life as a ransom for”** all mankind!

Jesus dismissed the brothers' request. He said, **“You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 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.”** Oh, they'd drink the cup of bitter sufferings for Jesus' sake. All but one—John the Evangelist—would die a martyr's death. None would enjoy the celebrity status of a televangelist. They'd be hated, reviled, stoned, stabbed and crucified. James was the first to go. **Acts 12** says that **“King Herod had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword”** (v. 2). Tradition holds that John's foes tried to poison him—another reason his icon is a chalice with a snake.

What bitter **“cup”** of suffering have you had to drink because of your allegiance to Jesus? What **“cup”** of persecution have you had to drain because of your faith in Him? Is your house divided because you trust in Jesus while your spouse or kids don't? Ever been

mocked at school or excluded at work for not going along with the crowd? No matter. You have other cups to drink from: the cup of Jesus' blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins, in His Supper; the cup of eternal life in heaven, where you'll dip your chalice into the crystal-clear waters of the **"river of the water of life ...flowing from"** beneath **"the throne of God and of the Lamb"** its banks flanked by **"the tree of life"** whose fruit we'll be free to feast on forever, **"For no longer will there be any curse"** of sin or fear of death (Rev. 22:1-3)!

Today, Jesus asks us what He asked **"James and John"**: **"Can you drink the cup I drink?"** With them, we reply, **"We can."** We can, for Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath against us to its dregs on Calvary's cross. We can, for we drink the cup of His redeeming blood in a supernatural way in His Supper. And we can, for we know that one day we'll dip the cup of salvation into the crystal clear pools of the river of the water of life in heaven and our spiritual thirst will be slaked forever! Yes, by God's grace and by His Spirit we're 100% certain we *want to* drink of Christ's cup! Amen.