

29 March 2009
Lent 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Glory of the Cross”

Text: Mark 10:32-45 (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:1-10)

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

James and John really didn't know what they were asking. Jesus had shown them a *glimpse* of His glory in the Transfiguration, but of the full and awesome glory of God, they had no idea.

They also had no idea what it was going to cost Jesus to secure this glory for them. Oh, He told them. Three times. The third time right before their request for the places on the right and left of Jesus. He told them: ***“we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”*** They heard that, just like they had seen the Transfiguration - but still, they had no idea what Jesus was about to endure. Not only the physical agony, but the spiritual. The weight of the sins of the world crushing Him. The fire of divine wrath against sin consuming Him as a burnt offering on the altar of the cross. The abandonment by both friends and Father.

This was the baptism that Jesus was baptized with. Jesus is baptized in water by John as our **substitute**; He is baptized in blood as our **atonement**; and He is baptized in fire as our **redeemer**. He is the high priest who offers up not a lamb or goat, but His own sinless, spotless life for the life and salvation of the world. (Hebrews 5, Epistle)

Can you drink this cup, James and John? Can you endure this baptism? Can you share in the glory of the cross? ***“We are able,”*** they said. But they have no idea what they are saying. For when push comes to shove, they will run away in fear, cover their eyes in horror, and hide in shame. They are not able.

But do not criticize James and John for their request. Jesus doesn't. You know who does? The other ten disciples. They were the ones who got all put out with James and John, because they felt ambushed; because they all really coveted those seats for themselves - they just hadn't gotten up the courage to ask! So do not follow them in covering their coveting hearts with mock indignation, feigning shock to

cover their own hypocrisy. If you want to follow anyone here, follow James and John - at least they were taking Jesus at His Word, when He said **“Ask and you shall receive.”** (Matt 7:7) We are to be bold in our prayers, *asking as dear children ask their dear father.* (Small Catechism, Explanation of the Introduction) So Jesus doesn't rebuke them for asking - but He does use the opportunity to teach them, and the others, and us.

So no, do not criticize James and John for their request. That's what's often done here. But that's too easy, and allows us to remain hypocrites. *First let us take the log out of our own eyes before looking for the speck in theirs.* (Matt 7:3) For we, too, often do not know what we are asking. The glory that we seek, the things that we covet, the requests that we make, may not be good for us. Jesus doesn't rebuke us for asking either - but don't be surprised if He uses the opportunity to teach us, and to answer our prayer not by giving us what we ask for, but what is better.

For so it is with James and John - they do not yet understand that the true glory of God is not what they saw in the Transfiguration, but what they were about to see with Jesus hanging on the cross. For there on the cross is the glory of a love we cannot even begin to imagine. There on the cross is the glory of the Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, suffering for His creature's sins. There on the cross is the glory of the Son of God **giving His life as a ransom for many.** And it is this giving which is the true glory of God. Being all-knowing isn't glorious if you use your knowledge to hurt. Being all-powerful isn't glorious if you use your power to be a bully. Being present everywhere isn't glorious if you use your presence to threaten. It is God using His power for us and for our salvation that is His true glory. The glory for which we thank and praise Him. The glory which He comes to provide and give to us, and which we now receive in Word and Sacrament as His gift to us.

And so the baptism with which Jesus is baptized, James and John and you and me *do* receive - only now it has been transformed by the glory of the cross, that it be now a baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection, that our old body of sin may be killed, and we may rise with Him to a new life.

And the cup that Jesus drinks, James and John and you and me *do* also now drink - only now it has been transformed by the glory of the cross, that it be now for us a cup no longer filled with wrath and condemnation and death, but now filled with the life-giving blood of Christ, that we may live in His forgiveness and salvation.

And so *in this way* we are given to share in the glory of Christ. James and John did not receive the places at Jesus' right and left in this glory - those places were taken by the two criminals that Jesus was crucified between. **Instead, Jesus gave them what was better** - a seat in heaven, and the glory of following in His servant steps

here on earth. And in those steps James would follow, as he was the first of the twelve to be martyred - as he felt not nails, but the cold steel of Herod's sword come down upon his neck. And in those steps John would follow, for even though he was spared the martyr's sword, his reward would be the *longest* suffering - the only apostle to live to a ripe old age.

And now in those steps it is our glory to follow. For ***“whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.”*** To our worldly ears and minds and hearts and desires, that does not sound glorious - in fact, just the opposite. It sounds like something to be avoided! That's why it must be learned in the school of discipleship, from the mouth of our Saviour, and preached into our hearts - that we think and live and be in a new way. A Christ way. On our own, we are not able to do this. But in Christ, born again and transformed by Him and His cross, we *are* able.

Not that it will be easy! The life of a disciple is more often like boot camp than it is a nice, easy apprenticeship. Our neighbors are not always easy to love; heck, our spouses and children and parents are not always easy to love! Our pride is difficult to harness, often taking off and running loose like a wild horse! Our hearts and desires keep returning to the vomit of sin, thinking that there is what we want, and what will make us happy. And drunk with sin, we wake up the next morning not happy but hungover; not fulfilled but empty; not glorious, but humiliated.

And that's exactly when we see the glory of our Saviour, who is not standing over us, shaking His finger at us, and rebuking us, but who came down to be with us in the vomit of our sin, clean us up with His forgiveness and life, and restore us. That as often as we fall - which is often! - we return to His life-giving waters and wash clean; we return to His Word and receive His absolution; we return to His body and blood and be fed and strengthened by Him. And in all these ways, that we continue to live in the glory of His cross. His cross, from which He continues to give us maybe not what we want, but what is even better - what we need. *Exactly* what we need and *all* that we need. To be His children and live as His children and to follow in His way.

And where does this all lead? To heaven . . . yes, in the end. But not yet. For now, we live in the vomit of sin. No longer our own sin - for Jesus lifts us up and cleanses us and restores us with His life and forgiveness! Now, it is our neighbor's. That we go to Him as Christ has come to us. That we serve Him as Christ has served us. That we forgive Him as Christ has forgiven us. That we love Him as Christ has loved us. *And you are never more glorious than when you do.* For when you do, Christ is living in you, and through you. When you do, you are proclaiming His death, in Word and in deed. When you do, you are showing a glorious love that is not your own - that we don't even know enough to ask for! - but which your Lord

has given you.

Let us now go up to Jerusalem and see this love. Let us now go up to Jerusalem in heart and mind as we enter Passiontide - the last two weeks of Lent - and see our glorious Saviour. His glory for you. **The glory of His cross.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.