

21 March 2021
The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Amazing Glory, Amazing Love”

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

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

Jesus and His disciples are *on the road going up to Jerusalem*. You always went “up” to Jerusalem. It is a city on a hill. But Jesus would go even higher, higher than Jerusalem. For He would be lifted up above Jerusalem. On the cross. He knew it. He told His disciples. It was barely more than a week away now.

Mark tells us that as they were going up, *they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid*. They were not alone, going up. The Passover was approaching. Many were on their way. The city was filling up.

But *why* the disciples were amazed, and *why* those who followed were afraid, Mark doesn't tell us. But perhaps it is for the same reason. Jerusalem is where the scribes and Pharisees were. Who were actively plotting against Jesus, how to get rid of Jesus. And their opposition was intensifying. Jesus is going right into the lions' den. They are *amazed* that He is, and *afraid* that He is. And even moreso when they hear His next words: *that He will be condemned, mocked, spit on, flogged, and killed*. Things to be avoided! Not walked into. But for this Jesus came. He will not be deterred. *And after three days He will rise*. But what does *that* mean?

So it may seem like an odd time for James and John to approach Jesus with their request. They want to be close to Him in His glory. *Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory*. It seems like such a crass request, so inappropriate, especially coming on the heels of what Jesus had just told them. But maybe not. Throughout the Old Testament, we hear of the dying giving their blessing to those who come after them. And some are famous. Jacob stole such a blessing from his brother, Esau. Jacob blessed his twelve sons in Egypt, which included a prophecy of the Saviour coming from his son, Judah. So if Jesus is going to die, they ask for this, this blessing, before He does.

So the request isn't wrong. The others get indignant, *but Jesus doesn't*. He doesn't rebuke them for their request - it's just that they don't understand what they are asking for. They don't understand what Jesus' glory is. They don't understand all that is going to unfold over the course of this next week. But they will . . .

They will see Jesus in His glory - when He is on the cross. That's what Jesus calls His glory. He is glorified through His death and resurrection. Because that's not glory for glory's sake. That's the glory of His love. The glory of His mercy. The glory of laying down His life for the life of the world. And in that glory, look who is on His right and left - two criminals. But not just criminals. One of them to be a son of God. Of course, Jesus couldn't say all that at this moment. James and John would not have understood. *Oh, no! That's not the glory we want!* They were looking for another kind of glory

Jesus knows that. And what that temptation is like. He is a High Priest who knows what we go through, for He Himself went through it. He was tempted like us. In this way, too. To get glory the easy way, tempted to *jump off the pinnacle of the Temple so that His angels would swoop in and rescue Him* (Luke 4:9-12), rather than through hanging on a cross. But He would not. There is a greater glory than that kind of glory; that kind of worldly glory. Though, like the cross, it doesn't look like glory or greatness. Not to our worldly eyes.

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

Servant? And slave of all? That's not greatness or glory - that's being low man on the totem pole. That's helping others be great, while you don't get anything. They get paid and you get bupkis.

Well, yes and no. Is it helping others be great, helping others up? Yes. Is it getting bupkis? Not exactly. Because there was one who did that for you, so you will never be at the bottom of the totem pole. There will always be one lower than you, serving you, helping you, raising you. That one now going up to Jerusalem to go up on the cross. The greatest who became the least.

And anyway, being at the top of the totem pole isn't all it's cracked up to be. When you are, in this world, the others who want to be there instead of you are targeting you to bring you down. Worldly greatness and glory is a competition, and it's never-ending. And you can be there one day and gone the next. Just ask all the folks whose streets are being renamed, monuments and statues removed, and histories being re-written. The world is moving on from them.

But God's greatness is completely upside-down from that. God doesn't target the great to bring them down - He targets the down and out to bring them up! To raise us up with Him. And if He does bring you down, it is *so that* He can raise you up. From worldly greatness and glory to His greatness and glory. So that even if you do not have a name here and now, your name be written in heaven.

So, James and John. You want those places? OK. *Can you be baptized with my baptism? Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?* Jesus asks. *Oh yes!* they say. And again, they don't know what they are saying. Jesus' baptism is a baptism of blood. His cup the cup of suffering and death. And so it would be to James and John according to their word - they would be so baptized and they would drink that cup; they would be martyred. And it would be for their service of others. They would not achieve, but *receive*, that glory. From God. But not yet. Now was Jesus' day.

And here again we see the upside-down greatness and glory of God! For what about you and me? Will you and I be baptized with His baptism? Will we suffer, be persecuted, and maybe even die for our faith? For proclaiming God's Word and sticking to what it says? Maybe. The tide of this world is turning against the Christian truth. Will we drink that cup of suffering and death? Maybe.

But this we DO know - that Jesus was baptized with our baptism and He drank our cup! He was baptized as a sinner and became the sinner of sinners. He drank the cup of God's wrath against our sin down to it's very dregs. He *gloriously* took it all for us. That's why He was headed to Jerusalem. *To give His life as a ransom for many.* Which, according to the Hebrew mind, **doesn't mean less than all but more than all.** *Many* doesn't limit Jesus' atonement, but expands it. *All* would be all those who were there at that time. *Many* means those and many more. It means the all of us who are great at sinning! 'Cuz *that's* what we're all great at. Think of all the sin you did just this week . . . Then multiply that by all the weeks in your life . . . Then multiply that by all the people in the world . . . Then multiply that by all the people who ever lived . . . That's one big cup of wrath Jesus drank! One very big glorious cup!

And because He did, He did leave a blessing behind for us. A cup of blessing. The one we drink here. A cup filled not with wrath, but with forgiveness and life. To give us a great and glorious life like His great and glorious life. Of serving others, helping others, forgiving others. Because He is always doing that for us. That there be not just one or two places in glory with Him, but a countless number, of people *from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue* (Revelation 7:9). Places for great sinners, sinners no more. Because of the greatness and glory of Jesus and His cross.

Because we have a great High Priest who was saved from death, and so is a High Priest forever. The earthly high priests of the Old Testament served for a time and served people of a time. But Jesus is the High Priest of the New Testament, for all people of all time. Who saved us from death by death. Because our physical death isn't the death we need to worry about. Physical death lasts for a time, but spiritual death lasts forever. Jesus goes up to Jerusalem to die the first death, to save us from the second. So that when we die, we will live. We will be raised, just as He is, to life.

So today we enter Passiontide - the last two weeks of the Lenten season, when the glory

of Jesus shines more brightly than ever. But it is a hidden glory. Hidden under intense suffering and gory death. But a glory that we know is there. So we veil the cross today. It is hidden from our eyes until it's glory is unveiled for us again on Good Friday. We also, starting today, you may have noticed, refrain from singing or speaking our *gloria patris* (*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit*). That, too, is hidden from us for a little while. But as Jesus rose to life again, so will these. ***The days are coming***, Jeremiah said, of the New Covenant, the New Testament, the resurrection. Jesus' and ours.

So until that day, we take our place not on Jesus' right or life, but at His Table. And He comes in His hidden greatness, feeding us with His Body and giving us His Blood to drink, raising us to life in the forgiveness of our sins, and giving us a new life of glory and greatness to live. Not the world's, but His. And as you do, you may be condemned, mocked, spit on, flogged, and killed, too. But if you are, you are not alone. And if you are, you will live. For you're not at the bottom of the totem pole. Jesus is. For you. With you. Raising you. Saving you. Until the day of a new glory comes.

Until it does, let us join the twelve and go up to Jerusalem and be amazed, but not afraid. For in the world's hate is Jesus' love. In His cross is glory. And in His death is life.

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.