

## “More: Cup Sharing”

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**Mark 10:32-45**

February 11, 2024

Today we wrap up this series “More,” this walk through a part of the Gospel of Mark, looking at Christ’s call to discipleship, his *challenging* call to discipleship, of putting oneself last of all, and serving all. But before we get to today’s passage, a word on what’s coming next.

This Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, as I shared earlier, begins the season of Lent, a season of deliberate reflection and repentance in preparation for Christ’s passion. Next Sunday in worship, we’ll welcome our guest Rev. Steve Cuss, our Winter Speaker, who will focus on some core beliefs in Christ and how they, rather than other influences, can guide us into peace, and soothe anxiety.

And the following week, February 25, we’ll begin what will be our emphasis during this Lenten season: time in wilderness. Has life ever felt aimless, anxious, wandering? If it’s ever felt that way, you’re not alone. It’s part of Israel’s story, part of our faith story. And so we’ll be joining the covenant people of God in their winding journey to the Promised Land, along with all the turmoil that went with them. That’ll start in two weeks.

Today, though, as we conclude this look at part of Mark’s Gospel, we’ll end on a note that may sound familiar—it’s a point Jesus has made before—but something that apparently we can’t hear enough times. Let’s go to God’s Word together, Mark 10:32-45.

*They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the gentiles; they will mock him and spit upon him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise again.”*

*James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Appoint us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to appoint, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”*

*When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me? Almighty God, Thy Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Be with us, we pray, for though in our hearts we may want to seek you, though we may try to seek you, inevitably we can lose sight of the call you have placed before us. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

As we were reading this, you might have thought, wait a minute, we've heard this sort of thing before. Right at the beginning of it, as they're going to the holy city, Jesus says, "See we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

You hear that and you wonder, "Didn't he say that already, or something like that already?" And the answer is, yes he has. Three times he says this sort of thing, and we started this whole series five weeks ago looking at one of them. Three times, Jesus makes the same point, very similarly worded. First he shares how the Son of Man would be handed over and killed, but would rise again on the third day. And then, right after sharing that, he tells what it means to follow him: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." Then at another point, in fact where we dropped in for the start of this series, the second time of this kind of sequence, he says "Whoever wants to be first of all must be last of all and servant of all."

And if you were reading through Mark, and you hear the words that Christ teaches here, you might be thinking, "Hmm, there seems to be a common thread." And you would be right. You know who didn't catch on? James and John. Well, really all of them.

In response to Christ teaching that he would suffer and die, go up to him and say, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And then adding, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." I mean, a) the gall of doing that. I mean, what did they think the deal was: if they were the first to ask, they got first dibs or something? But b) haven't they been listening? Didn't they remember how that sort of thing went the other two times?

And so Christ responds, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?" That's another way of saying, "Are you willing to share in the same fate that I will face?" That is, they seem to be hearing just fine his declaration that he will rise again into glory. They like that. But they're conveniently forgetting all those things he said would happen to him, being handed over, being humiliated, being killed. Can you share in the cup that I will drink?

Before we beat up on them too much, I think it's fair to note that what Christ is teaching here, what Christ has been teaching, isn't easy to hear, much less accept and apply. It's not the way the world works. Jesus points out as much: "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them." That's easy to understand. Those who are considered great, those who are considered to be in authority, well what marks them as great, as better, as more? Well, because they wield the authority to impose that authority upon others, to compel others to serve and obey them. What makes someone greater? To make someone else lesser, of course. You lift yourself up by pushing someone else down. That's easy to understand. It's what they see every day. It's what we see every day.

So before we beat up too much on James and John and the rest of them for not getting with the program, we have to come clean that this way of embracing life by losing it does not come easy to us. Everything else

pushes us in the opposite direction. Become more by cutting out someone else. Become more by seeking your own fulfillment first in your relationships. Become more by gathering unto yourself more and more wealth and possessions. These are the markers of greatness. Doing the opposite of that does not come naturally.

So why does Christ see fit to make this point again and again? Because we don't get it.

You know who does get it? I know many of you were here last Sunday for Youth Sunday. If you weren't, go back and watch it. You heard our senior preachers share about their own faith and specifically how they heard those words of Christ we read: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

You heard Sarah Benko teach us about just how challenging it is to serve all especially when those you serve aren't so easy to serve, when they're unkind, when they're cruel. She noted Zacchaeus, you know "Climb up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see," a despised tax collector. Not easy to love, not easy to serve, but Jesus did.

You heard Tate Carty testify about a hard season in his own life following the death of his father, and the loneliness, the doubt, the anger that followed, and how he saw the church serve him, inspiring a renewal of faith.

You heard Olivia Katherine King teach about the humility of service, no matter the task, sharing about her time serving, leading, at a Young Life camp one summer, doing what? Offering inspiring messages to the students there? Guiding heartfelt Bible studies and discussions? I'm sure she did some of that, but what did she talk about instead? Something not so glamorous. Washing dishes, all day, every day, to serve the others who came.

You heard Alex Ewell teach us that we can have an intellectual understanding of God, of Jesus. We can think we have an understanding of what it means to love Christ, but really we don't quite get it until we realize that "we love Jesus when we love others."

And you heard Lana Grace Fields teach us on how even in her own goals, she had sought service but honestly couldn't say why she was doing it all, not until recognizing why we serve. It's not because we're such nice people. It's because "The Lord calls us to give our life." In the way Jesus lays down his life, so we are called to lay down our life. "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

What Christ is teaching, what Christ is inviting James and John and his disciples to do, what Christ is in turn teaching and inviting us to do, is not just to sit back and reflect on just how wonderful it is that Christ laid down his own life for us. (It's right and good for us to do that; it just doesn't stop there.) He teaches and invites us to follow the same path. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant." And why? Because we're such nice people? No. Because that's what Christ has done for us. "For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Eighty years ago, sitting in prison cell in Nazi Germany, a German pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to friends reflections of faith, all while under trial for, in one way of looking at it, laying down his own life

for the sake of the gospel, resisting the more worldly call to power that he saw so evident in the Third Reich.

And among the things he wrote were these powerful declarations about the place and purpose of the church, that it's not to be on the transcendent edges of society, but right in its midst. And what kind of place? A place of power, of authority? No. Of lowliness. Of service. And why? Because the church is so nice, so decent? Again, no. It's because Christ's transcendence, Christ's holiness, is not just in his eternal other-worldliness, but because he was and is in our midst. Jesus, he wrote succinctly, is "the man for others."

And because Jesus, our Lord, is "the man for others," how should those who follow him respond? He says, "The church is the church only when it exists for others.... The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling, what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others."

In other words, just as the Son of Man lays down his life, so the church lays down its own life, for the sake of others.

This Sunday, as we have the past few years, we join with other houses of worship in what's called "Love Your Neighbor Sunday," led by our friends at First United Methodist. Its purpose isn't complicated. It's to remind and unite the church, even just in messaging, that we are most truly the church when we don't exist for ourselves, but rather laying down our lives for the community.

We heard this from our Youth Sunday preachers. We hear it in the testimony about our friends in South Sudan. We see it in the dedicated service alongside local partners like KARM, FISH, and Thrive, and further afield in our medical missions team just returned from Guatemala.

We see it in our newer dedication to our friends at The Restoration House. In their mission equipping and empowering households led by single mothers, they have recognized that one of the greatest emotional, practical, and financial challenges facing the households they serve is the dearth of childcare and quality early childhood education. And so they've launched Olive Tree Early Learning Academy.

And to that, our Session has said, as a church we will be making a significant commitment of our time, our effort, our focus, and yes, of capital, in serving this particular challenge facing our city, and facing our friends over at The Restoration House.

And even more than challenges in our city and abroad, or service efforts we do as a church, this calling to become great by becoming servants seeps into every facet of our lives. It impacts us as friends to each other—how do we serve one another? How do we care for one another? It impacts us as spouses—how do we serve and love our husbands, our wives? It impacts us as parents—how do we serve our children as we raise them in faith? How do we model this kind of humility?

There's no shortage of ways it could be made evident. But I hope you've seen the common thread: that it's supposed to look different. That as we follow Christ, we should not operate in the way the world does. We don't follow the same rules. We don't have the same Lord. We share a different cup. The Lord we serve is not one who demands our obedience by fiat, law, or royal decree, but rather one who gave of himself first, and who calls us to do the same. Therein lies salvation.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.