

Lent 5 3/17/24
 Mark 10:32-45 B

“BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU. BUT WHOEVER WOULD BE GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, AND WHOEVER WOULD BE FIRST AMONG YOU MUST BE SLAVE OF ALL.”

Ready for a little quiz? That’s right, we’re going to start out this morning with a quiz. But, I’ll make it multiple-choice to help you out. Which of these two statements is true:

- a) “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none,” or
- b) “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

What is your answer? But, before you answer, you should know this is a trick question. I can do that; I’m the teacher. The correct answer is **c) “both of the above.”** A Christian is both a free lord of all and a dutiful servant of all. Martin Luther who set forth these two seemingly contradictory propositions in a treatise called “The Freedom of a Christian.”

And this idea was not new with Luther. Our Lord Jesus himself says as much in our text today from Mark 10. Here Jesus tells us two things: 1) that He came as a servant to set us free, and 2) that the way we live out that freedom is by being our neighbor. **BECAUSE JESUS SERVED US, WE ARE SET FREE TO SERVE.**

In the multiple-choice quiz I just gave you, we had a) “A Christian is free,” b) “A Christian is a servant,” and c) both of the above. But if we look at ourselves according to our old sinful nature, we find that the answer is actually **d) “none of the above.”** We were not free, nor were we servants of one another. According to the sinful nature, we were slaves to self, our self-centeredness, our ego.

Look at James and John in our Gospel. They're looking out for ... well, they're looking out for James and John. *And James and John...came up to Him and said to Him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you...Grant us to sit, one at your right hands and on at your left, in Your glory: (vv. 35, 37). Glory! Easy street.*

And we cannot ignore the other disciples. *And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John (v. 41).* "Indignant" – that means they were filled with rage. Do you understand what's going on here? They are jealous, envious, that James and John would have the audacity to seek the positions that think are rightly each and every one of theirs. Each and every one of the ten thought **he** was going to sit on the right or the left of Jesus in His kingdom of glory. Not James, not John, **me!**

Me! That's what life is all about! Looking out for # 1? This attitude, this mindset, shouldn't surprise us at all. God told us long ago, through the Apostle Paul,

in the last times there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to the parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim 3:1-3).

When you take a look at James and John, do you know what we see? We see ourselves. We are just as self-absorbed, self-centered. This is why you want your child to start on the sports team, so someone else's kid can sit on the bench. You want to win every argument with your spouse; you can't even admit it when you are wrong. You love it when the boss chews out your co-worker at work. You delight when your crop

flourishes into a bumper crop at harvest and your neighbor's crop is devastated by hail. Me! It's all about me!

There's another person in our lesson this morning we have not talked about. We've talked about James and John, the 10, but we have not talked about Jesus, who says, "*It shall not be so among you.*"

And He also says this, *Even the Son of Man came not to be served.*" Jesus calls himself "the Son of Man." That messianic title is taken from a prophecy in the Book of Daniel, where there is a vision of *one like a son of man*, who comes from heaven with *dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him* (7:13-14). If there ever was one that could rightfully demand that people bow down to serve Him, it was Jesus. But, no He says, *the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve* -- sinful, self-centered people, like James and John, the 10, you and me.

He did drink the cup of God's wrath as He was delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, for your self-centeredness, your selfishness, your arrogance, your conceit, all your sins. He was condemned to death and delivered over to the Gentiles. He was mocked and spit upon, flogged and killed by being nailed to the cross.

In His little Catechism, Martin Luther says it this way, "I believe that Jesus Christ...has redeemed me – ransomed me – a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." That means that we are free, free sin, from death, and from everlasting hell because Jesus has ransomed us.

And that means because Jesus drank His cup of suffering, the cup of wrath, He gives us a different cup, the cup of salvation. This cup of blessing which we drink is the cup of the Lord's Supper, where we receive Christ's blood shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. Strengthened by this salutary gift, we are able to live a holy life of glory to God and service to our neighbor.

There is more to Luther's meaning of the 2nd Article than what I quoted a minute ago. It goes like this: "that I may be his own and live under Him in his kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." You see, Christ has redeemed, ransomed us, for a purpose. Jesus has set us free from our slavery to selfishness, sin, and death. We've been set free to serve. We are slaves of Christ and servants of one another. That's why Paul teaches us in the Philippians, *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interest of others (2:4)*.

God has freed us from sin and self to do good works in the vocations He has called us to. In those vocations, we humbly serve our neighbor. After all, God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbor does. This is why the husband and father, as priest of his household, turns off the TV to pray with his family and teach his children the Catechism. This is why the tired mother sacrifices her own rest to get up at 3:00 am to soothe the crying infant. The teenager, perhaps not always willing, takes out the garbage. The child puts away their toys, because their parents told them to. The employee, when assigned a task by their supervisor, completes that task without grumbling or complaining, thus earning their wages in a God-pleasing manner.

In this season of Lent, as we learn again what it means to carry the cross, see that real greatness in the kingdom of God is service – humble and willing service to our neighbor in their needs, serving them as Christ has served us.