

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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October 17, 2021

Mark 10:32-45

For the last month or so, in our Gospel readings at worship Jesus has been on his way to Jerusalem, to the cross, where he is going to change everything. At the cross, Jesus brings the love of God to us, not just to the places in our world or in our souls where we are pretty, strong and good, but also to our crosses, that is, the places where we are broken and crushed, and even where we inflict crosses, where we are cruel and petty and hateful. Jesus brings the love of God to us there, and that changes everything.

Jesus has told his disciples three times that he is going to the cross to be killed and on the third day rise. This is what it means for him to be the Messiah, the Anointed One, the One who will save the world. But the disciples do not understand.

The world needs saving. It needed saving back then and it still needs saving now. We need saving. But often, when we need saving, we look for someone powerful, wealthy, of high status who makes a good appearance on the red carpet. We look for someone glorious to save us, and we miss Jesus.

Just after Peter calls Jesus the Messiah, the Anointed One who brings God's saving into the world, Jesus says he is going to be rejected and killed and on the third day rise. Peter rebukes Jesus as if he had a demon. That word "rebuke" is the same word Jesus uses when he rebukes a demon. I imagine Peter probably thought Jesus had gone crazy that he was possessed by a demon.

But Jesus turns and says that Peter is the one under demonic influence. “Get behind me, Satan,” Jesus says to Peter. “You are thinking like human beings, and not like God.”

Human beings are constantly thinking about power and status and wealth, while God considers something else.

Later on, Jesus and his disciples are walking on the road. Jesus tells them again that he is going to be killed and on the third day rise. But the disciples don't get it. They are arguing about who's the greatest. The relentless human question that misses the point completely.

Now, in the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus tells them again that the Son of Man will be rejected, killed and on the third day rise. This time, James and John come up asking to be placed on Jesus right and left side when he comes into his glory. They want to be on the front seat of that ride. When he saves the world and reaps the rewards, the power and the status and the wealth, when he imposes their way of looking at the world, their values, their nation's superiority over all the others, James and John want to be right there in the middle of the glory.

Jesus says, “You all have no idea what you're talking about.”

The disciples get angry at James and John, perhaps because James and John are trying to take more than their fair share of the glory that Jesus will come into. So Jesus calls them all together and says,

Whoever among you wants to be great. . .(Wouldn't it be great to have huge wealth? Wouldn't it be great to have great status, to have bands play for you as you walk down the red carpet? Wouldn't it be great to have enough power to make this country be the way we think it should be, to run world affairs according to our priorities, our values. That would be great.)

“Whoever among you wants to be great must be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be slave of all.” That's glory. That's the power that saves the world. “For the Son of Man,” Jesus, the Messiah “the Son of Man came not to be served. . .”

Stop for a moment there. Let that sink in. “The Son of Man came not to be served. . .” Jesus did not come to be agreed with and bowed down to like some super cosmic dictator. He did not come to be pleased and pampered like some absolute monarch. “The Son of Man came not to be served. . .”

Likewise, the Son of Man’s followers, we, Jesus’ followers did not come here to be served. We do not come to church to be served. We come to church to be strengthened so that we can serve.

We do not expect special treatment from the laws and government of our society, to make it easier for us to worship than it is for other religious groups. We do not expect any particular respect from our culture just because we’re Christian. We do not expect to be agreed with and bowed down to as if we owned the place. We came to serve, because that shows who Jesus is. That’s what Jesus does.

All of our supposed greatness, our wealth, our status, our power, without servanthood is nothing but dust. We know that. But with servanthood, our wealth or status or power has purpose, depth, meaning, even joy.

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” That’s how Jesus saves the world, “And to give his life as a ransom for many,” a freeing sacrifice, a release from bondage to evil powers, whether human or otherwise.

In this church, as in many churches, we have a few ways we like to serve. For example, we welcome refugee families. We may not be able to help all refugee families, but we can welcome one.

We also are building relationships with St. George’s Episcopal Church, Simmons College and West End School, all on the West End. If you want to do something about the murder rate in Louisville, you support institutions that are doing positive things in difficult places, led by people from those places. It takes a long time. But its servanthood.

One other way of serving: We have some Halloween cards for children and youth connected with our congregation. We are going to sign those cards as a way of letting them know we have them in our hearts and prayers. Not a big deal, but if we bring a smile to some kid’s face, we have served.

That's glory. That's how Jesus saves the world.