**Mark 10:35-45**

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” **36** And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” **37** And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” **38** Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” **39** And they said to him, “We are able.” And 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, **40** but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” **41** And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. **42**  And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **43** But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, **44** and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. **45** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**“Life Never Cut Short With Christ”**

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Major festivals in the church always have to do directly with Jesus and His life. Minor festivals turn attention to the saints that have gone before us with Christ lived out in their lives. Early Christians were not ashamed of those that carried their crosses. The boast made by the writer of Hebrews proclaims, “…we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses…”

Our Lutheran Fathers saw honoring the saints to have three benefits. First, thanksgiving over how God gave them as gifts to the Church. Second, strengthening our faith in the mercy God shows toward His saints. Third, imitating them both in faith and holding up the good that befits a Christian life. Honoring the saints then does not mean we pray to them. Nor does it mean their lives earned the title for them of, “saint.” Finally, it does not mean that any saint can somehow contribute to our salvation.

As we celebrate, St. James the apostle let us consider his background. He did not write the letter of James in the New Testament that was the brother of Jesus. Instead, this James was the elder brother of John a son of Zebedee. Since his father owned a fishing business, James must have been ambitious. Jesus called him and his brother to be “fishers of men.” James was part of the inner circle of Jesus. At the transfiguration, there was Peter, James, and John. In the Garden of Gethsemane, we find James and the other two with Jesus praying before His death.

Of course, something blatantly sticks out about James. He sought after the glory he desired for life. Along with his brother John, they were ambitious enough to see an opportunity. So on the way to Jerusalem they said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” No doubt, this was 100% for selfish purposes. It was a business investment for their future. They were making good on what Jesus had told His disciples, “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7).

Jesus already knew what James and his brother desired. Yet, He allowed them to ask it anyway. “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” It is like saying, “Let us be your first round draft pick or let us be the CEOs of your corporation the church.” Such a request revealed the selfish glory in their sinful hearts. The sons of Zebedee wanted it all fame, success, power, and whatever else. What they desired did not fit what God sent in His Son. They needed His service as the ultimate ransom for their lives by the cross.

We desire glory that is no better off than James and his brother. The greed for glory we have a sinners does not come with much generosity. Instead of repentance as God’s people, we seek to revel in whatever is our heart’s desire. On its own, our desire is never content. It means tearing down whatever stands in my way. It leads to rejecting any good of the Law for standards of my own making. It finally seeks to replace the God who saves sinner with idols fit for my life. This glory has no love for neighbor and even demands God to submit to every desire of our heart.

If we seek not after glory like James and John, we can always fall in line with the other disciples. They were bitter and jealous at these two sons of Zebedee who stepped out in front. We can hold this kind of resentment against what God gives as gifts to our brothers and sisters. Rather than repent of our unworthiness, we grumble, cut down, and hold plenty against others. Jesus desires to release His disciples from the greed of glory and whatever bitterness. He brings the bailout proclaiming, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Our Lord has one kind of glory he sees and that is His cross. There is no bitterness because He came to be the sacrifice. For Jesus to bring the “ransom” means we are slaves. Slaves can do nothing by their own right or power. On our own, there is only enslavement to our sinful desires. Since Jesus has no sin, but became sin for us. He is the redeemer, the ransom that has paid the price. His blood was the perfect sacrifice to set us free. His innocent death the answer God gives for sinners. The Gospel of Jesus Christ changes our sinful desire by the glory He first claims in the cross and empty tomb.

The Lord gave James glory far more than he had asked. He promised this apostle and his brother that they would drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism. This meant all prayerful requests or whatever we ask comes shaped by the cross. Rather than giving James glory by his standard, Jesus had a greater desire. James would suffer at the hand of sinners for the sake of the Gospel. Since John the baptizer was the last prophet killed by Herod, God saw fit to have James be the first apostle killed by another Herod. Christ used the ambition of James to be first among the twelve to step out and die a martyr’s death.

By Word and Sacrament Jesus brings His desire for us into our time. He keeps forgiving all our sin so that we can fight the good fight in a world of darkness by His Word. He has redeemed us so that ransomed from slavery to the Devil we can serve Him in His kingdom. He loves us so that we are never without Him filling our life with His true presence in the sacrament. This glory from Christ also brings a cup and baptism of suffering upon us like James and John. Perhaps we will not face martyrdom, but daily the sinner in us still must die to self.

Putting to death self, the old Adam, can be just as threatening as persecution. God must first kill us with the Law to raise us as His saint with the Gospel. God divorcing the sinner from his or her sin is never painless, but always holds a promise. This suffering happens because God reaches into our hearts filled with all kinds of sinful desires. It is to create something new by the grace given for us in Jesus. A heart that now beats with faith in Him. This glory has no need to hide in self, but in the crucified Son of God.

The death of James was tragic. Yet, did you notice it is only one verse? We dare not let anything in this life cloud our good confession. St. Paul tells us, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” James desired a glorious life; Christ redeemed his life for eternity. James desired to be first with John; Christ let them learn servanthood. James had his life cut short, but John his brother died last of all the apostles.

The Lord takes away only to give far more than what any want. What we need is His cross and empty tomb. Christ turns our sinful desires to serve Him with a free spirit as His saints. This is possible because He has paid the ransom for everyone. Being a disciple of Christ means God gives greater things in the cross. This foreign glory is odd to the world, but at work in our life as a witness to our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen