

“Glory in the Cross”

Mark 10:32-45

As we have seen in recent weeks, the appointed readings for this time of year jump around quite a bit. This week, we get dropped into the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has already been with Peter, James, and John on the Mt. of Transfiguration. Jesus and the disciples are walking along the road on their way to Jerusalem.

Mark records they were “amazed” and “afraid.” Why? Jesus just finished telling the crowd that if you wish to have “treasure in heaven” then sell all you have, give to the poor, and come follow Me. And Peter said, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” And Jesus replies that one of the things you will assuredly receive for following Me and the Gospel is persecution, “and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

And they were amazed and afraid. And Jesus tells them something which would cause even more fear. Jesus says, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise.”

They have heard this before. In fact this is the third time Jesus has spoken plainly about what is to come. Remember a couple weeks ago when Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ, and Jesus told them not to tell anyone about Him until they actually understood who He was. And He begins to teach them that the Christ must suffer, be rejected by all the Jewish leaders, be killed and after three days rise again. He says this plainly.

And Peter takes Him aside and demonstrates exactly why Jesus will not allow him to tell others about the Christ. Peter rebukes Jesus – says, “This must never be.” Peter can confess that Jesus is the Christ, but he has no idea who the Christ truly is. So Jesus says, “Get behind Me Satan.” We all know the story.

And the world hasn’t changed. How many in our world today are convinced in their mind that they know God? But in reality, they have no idea who Christ truly is or why He came. Now in the grand scheme of things, none of us “truly” know who God is because He is incomprehensible. “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” You cannot fully understand He who stretches beyond the borders of the universe.

But He has revealed Himself in His Word. We cannot fully know Him, but we can fully confess Him. “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ . . .”

This is the context in which we find ourselves traveling along with Jesus and the disciples. Listen to His words. The disciples just don't learn. They just don't get it. And they won't get it; they won't understand who Jesus truly is and why He has come until after the resurrection.

At least this time, when Jesus tells the disciples of His coming suffering and death, it isn't Peter who says something foolish. No one dares rebuke Jesus this time, but James and John have a question for Him.

It's funny, in the other Gospel accounts, we hear how it was actually James and John's mother who does the asking, but in typical Markan fashion, he gets to the point. James and John want to place themselves first – over and above the other disciples. They want the places of honor. James and John are just as delusional about Jesus (who He is and why He came) as Peter is. They want to be at His right and His left in His glory.

Weren't they listening? “The first shall be last and the last shall be first.” You want glory in the kingdom of God? Prepare to be uncomfortable. Jesus is going to come into His glory on the cross. Jesus tells them plainly, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup (of suffering) that I drink?” When I come into My glory, there will be someone at my right and at my left (being crucified along with Me), but you really do not want to change places

with them and drink the cup of suffering that I drink.

Now, this whole ongoing conversation is really about authority – not raging, powerful authority the way the world sees authority and power – but rather, the authority to give oneself up as a sacrifice for others. This is true authority where power is made perfect in weakness; where God’s wisdom is revealed through foolishness; where Jesus saves the world from death by dying.

Only He has the authority to exercise true authority. The Pharisees, all throughout His ministry, as He healed the sick and cast out demons, they keep asking Him, “by what authority do you do these things?” When Jesus cleared the money-changers out of the temple (as we read a couple weeks ago), that was their question to Him – “by what authority? With the follow-up question being, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?”

Jesus tells them. The only sign they will receive is the sign of Jonah – as he was three days in the belly of the great fish, I will be three days in the belly of the earth.

This is the same thing Jesus has been telling the disciples all along the way: “the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise.” Amen.