

The Fifth Sunday in Lent – 2021

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:32-45

Have you ever been out of your element? Have you ever been out of your element and not known it? Thurston Howell III would be out of his element helping to rebuild a tranny at Pep Boys. Madonna would be out of her element at a convent. To be out of your element is to be in a situation where you are either uncomfortable or unqualified to deal with the subject matter. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were out of their element and they didn't know it. It would be temporary, this outside looking in situation that those two brothers found themselves in. You and I, we have been out of our element with the Lord Christ at times. He doesn't leave us there, in the spiritual desert, in the theological dark. He draws us in.

This conversation that we are about to examine between Jesus and the sons of Zebedee is a perfect illustration of the radical breach between the church and the unbelieving world. You want to know why we are aliens and strangers on this earth, here's your CliffsNotes. James and John come to the Lord with a request. Jesus is on the inside. He knows what is about to unfold. He knows His Father's plan. He knows what is at stake, He knows what His sacrifice will mean, He knows the magnificence of this Divine Service – He knew about Christ the King Lutheran Church and He had us in mind when He spoke to James and John. The two ole boys are on the outside. James and John come to the Lord with an outsider's request. "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you" (Mark 10:35). You can't fault their boldness. Jesus is happy to take the bait. "And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?'" (Mark 10:36). James and John give it to Him straight. "'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory'" (Mark 10:37).

The Sons of Zebedee want the big-time. Make one of us Tom Brady and one of us LeBron James, only in a religious way. Make one of us Bing and the other Frank, only in a religious way. Make one of us Zeus and the other Apollo, we want our heads on the Mt. Rushmore of your church. James and John want to be big, want to be on stage, want to be in the ecclesiastical board room. "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." You can't get more "inner circle" than that request. Soon the Lord and the sons of Zebedee would be talking past one another. James and John are out of their element; they are confused; confused by worldly notions of power, and glory and prestige.

Jesus gives it back to them straight. "You do not know what you are asking" (Mark 10:38). And that is most certainly true. They are most certainly out of their element. Like putting an eight-year-old in charge of the launch sequence at NASA. "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?" All James and John could see were stars; all they could see were their names up in lights. "We are able," was their emptyheaded response. James and John view Christ and His kingdom one way; Jesus is preparing Himself for something entirely different. Even though they had been told in no uncertain terms, they still do not understand that the Lord Christ had come... to suffer. No stars, no bright lights, no adoring fan base... just a forlorn cross at Calvary.

In the workplace, the ideal is that if one performs well, then he is promoted, gains responsibility, and generally has more people working under them. It makes sense. Cream rises to the top and all that. Christianity does not operate that way. The greatest serves... whoever, whenever, wherever. The cream stays anonymous and continues to serve at the bottom. The worldly paradigm of glamour and adulation for the big performer is antithetical to the church. Contentment; have you found contentment in service? Have you discovered what joy there is in serving the least? Have you discovered what joy there is in no one noticing and applauding your good works? Too often we adopt the world's paradigm and import it into our Lord's church. We hold onto the idea that the least serve the greatest because that's what makes sense to our worldly minds, our impoverished hearts. You wonder why there is no joy in your heart all the while refusing to serve others, those who are supposedly beneath you. Are you more comfortable in the world or in this Divine Service? Where, exactly, are you out of your element?

Run these beauties through your heart and mind. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). That is our element for it is Christ's element and He calls us into His life. We align our lives with that fundamental reality and joy is the welcome houseguest of our heart.

James and John were given an answer that they surely didn't understand, that is, until some time later. How about us? This is our element. We have the full picture. Do you know what you know? You know that the Lord came into His glory on a Friday afternoon. Two criminals were crucified with Him – one on His right hand and one on His left. Jesus was lifted up, high and exalted, and His throne was a rugged cross. Jesus was hanged on a tree not for fame, it was not for power or a new trendy pop movement – it was to pay; to pay for sin. In His suffering, the glory of the incarnate Son of God was unleashed. James and John were not clamoring for those positions on Good Friday. "Can you drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" We are able. No James, you are not able. No John, you are not able. "Where I am going you cannot come" (John 8:21).

But there is another side of the cross, the side that we are on. "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized" (Mark 10:39). There is only one way to understand that cryptic statement. There is only one, beautiful, gospel-oriented way to be brought inside this revelation. This Divine Service is the lens that clarifies His words. On one occasion, Jesus was encouraged by His disciples to eat. Jesus said: "I have food to eat that you do not know about... My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:31, 34). The cup that Jesus drinks is the cup of the Father's wrath against my sin, yours too (Luke 22:42). Only He is on that side of the cross, that side of the cup, that side of the food, that side of baptism (Luke 12:49-50). Jesus does His Father's will; He renders up His life for you. He drinks the cup of suffering that James could not drink, nor John, nor you. He drinks the cup of suffering for the whole world.

But in death, He reconstitutes the food. Now He gives you new food, the new food of His completed work, His body which you eat. In death He changes the cup of suffering, the cup of the Father's wrath and He gives it to you as a cup of blessing. What was bitter on Jesus' side of the cross, on Jesus' side of the cup has become sweet for us who receive His forgiveness, His

righteousness, His love. You eat of Him. He is your food. You drink His cup. His chalice is your health. You are in your element when you receive His service. James and John did not drink the cup of suffering for the world – only Christ – He drained it. “It is finished!” (John 19:30). And then He filled the cup back up. With His blood. It is new wine for your soul, a heavenly banquet which is a foretaste of the feast to come. We are baptized with His baptism. His world redeeming death is in the water of our font. It is a river of the water of life. The Son of Man serves the least – you and me. He places us in His element, His life, His death, His resurrection. That is why music fills this house.