



Immanuel Lutheran Church

Transcript from March 21, 2021 sermon preached by Rev. Tab Ottmers

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The text for our sermon this morning comes from the epistle, and also the Gospel reading that was just read, and in particular these verses; in the epistle reading, we hear from Hebrews chapter five, verse eight, "although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." And also in the Gospel reading, "When James and John, the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus, they said, 'teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.'" And then also keeping in mind the disciples response to this verse 41, "When the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John."

A little brotherly scuffle, James and John and the other ten. Family matters. Life in the family. Now, don't tell my brother or my sister, or my mom, I guess, for that matter--but moms kind of know everything. Don't tell my brother and sister, but I wasn't always honest with them when we were growing up. I know it's hard to believe, but it's true. I would try to trick my siblings. When my parents would offer us three things--here you three, we have three toys, we have three pieces of candy, whatever it might have been. I would always, of course, evaluate the three things of choice, and I would figure out which thing I didn't want. And then what would I do? Well, I would tell my brother, "that's the best thing." I think it's called reverse psychology. "You don't want that candy bar, dear brother. Doesn't that black licorice looks so much tastier? Don't you know black licorice makes you stronger and faster. I'll take the butter finger. You can have the licorice." No offense if you like black licorice. But the devil so often tries to do the same thing. And we see it kind of taking place in our readings today. The devil tempts our sinful flesh to desire the kingdom of this world by enticing us with that which is actually bad for us. By telling us that the kingdom of God, it's really not that great. That serving others is bad because you can't have what you want. That our pride is king. For you notice how Jesus ended our Gospel reading. He says, if you want to be great, you must be a slave to all.

Today, Jesus corrects us and the disciples. Jesus is the good brother. He tries to teach us that even though the devil appeals to our sinful flesh and promising us greatness when we give into the temptation to love and serve ourselves, Jesus guides us to see himself as taking all of our bad. Jesus takes all of our sin and he gives us blessedness. So, we should learn to pray for greatness in the kingdom of God. And we should learn to be indignant at our own sin. Right before our reading today. I mean, it's a strange question. It almost feels like it comes out of left field. James and John say, "Jesus, we want to sit at your rights and your left hand and your kingdom." Well, before our reading today, earlier in the Gospel, Jesus told his disciples that when he sits on his glorious throne in the new world, he said, "you disciples, you will also sit with me on thrones, and you will judge Israel." So now that we hear a little bit of background as to why James and John would ask this question, it makes a little bit more sense. This question isn't just from out in left field, Jesus had already told them this would happen.



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So, James and John, they're asking a question from faith. They actually believe what Jesus had just told them; that they will be ruling on thrones and in glory. So, it's not such a strange question. But perhaps this is why Jesus doesn't rebuke James and John when they ask this question, but Jesus is patient with them. He's willing to teach them. He doesn't just respond, "you fools. Why would you care about such things? Why are you worried about thrones and glory?" Like the other disciples--how does Mark put it? That they were indignant. Perhaps probably snickering a little bit at their brothers. Jesus, though, is not indignant toward the Sons of Thunder, as they're known. And thank God, for Jesus uses this moment to teach them and us of his mercy, and patience. James and John at least, well, at least they have a little bit of perspective that's on target. They know they want to be important in the kingdom of God that Jesus is bringing. Is that so bad? Is that worthy of indignation from the other ten? Not only that, by asking Jesus, they believe that Jesus can bestow this greatness, and they are brave to ask him. At least they know who to go to when they want something, and that he will hear them. Is that so terrible, that they desire to be in places of prominence in the kingdom of Jesus when he comes in his glory?

Dare I say, that is better than many of the thoughts that run through our heads each day, about how to gain glory in this life. Indeed, better and more faithful than the relentless striving and time that we put into managing our finances, planning for the future, or even just what we're going to do this week, or this day. How often do we consider and ask, "how am I able to be great in the kingdom of God?" The other disciples, they were indignant. We are maybe not actively indignant toward James and John, but we have a passive indignation. A passive indignation shown by our neglect of even considering the question of being great in the kingdom of God. Yes, we are too standing there with the ten, indignant toward James and John, but we show it in different ways. We show our indignation toward James and John, but really it's indignation toward what it means to be great in the kingdom of God. Or it's an indignation toward what glory with Jesus means. That's probably why the other ten were upset with James and John. They maybe even saw James and John, like the one always sucking up to mom and dad, always trying to please them. You would probably be indignant toward James and John too. But there's something deeper here for us to learn. Something deeper here than just who's trying to score extra credit with Jesus.

To be honest, our sinful flesh doesn't really want to be glorious in the kingdom of God. But we want our own kingdom. And we want to define the glory for ourselves. Perhaps reflecting on how you ask Jesus--reflecting on your prayers--what are you praying for? Have you considered asking Jesus for greatness in his kingdom? What if Jesus said to you precisely what he said to James and John, what do you want me to do for you? What would it be? Or maybe it's the lack of prayers. Maybe your prayers have weakened maybe your prayers have become not as common are often. What is it in your life that you're striving towards? What do you discipline yourself for? Exercise, job training, social media, hobbies. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. It isn't so much that Christianity is strange or makes odd claims on us and our lives. Every hobby, every interest, every job makes claims on you. Claims on your time, claims on your effort, claims on your heart, your soul and your mind. It's not that Christianity is the



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same as a hobby or a job. However, all hobbies, sports, jobs, interests, they can all be made into a false religion that we are more excited about. We're more ready to pray to. We're more ready to devote our time to. We are more ready to strive toward excellence in. Certainly, Christ's demands your heart, body, soul and mind. All the other things, whatever it might be that gets your attention, it doesn't demand all of you. Perhaps that's how it's different. Just a little here, a little there. As long as you begin to choose something over God's word, as long as you choose something over the disciplines of the faith, as long as you choose your type of glory over the glory that Christ defines.

That word indignation, it means disgust or anger. The same word was used by Mark earlier in his gospel when the disciples didn't want parents to bring their children to Jesus. And it wasn't the disciples who were indignant, but, Mark says, Jesus was indignant. And he said, "don't hinder the children. For to such belongs the kingdom." The disciples were being further taught what the kingdom of Jesus' glory is like, and who it belongs to, and they weren't too keen on this idea, being like a child. But Jesus doesn't care. He must teach the disciples and us the truth. What is worthy of our indignation? Not James and John, at least not in our reading today. And certainly not the kingdom of Christ. But we should be indignant at our sin.

First, we should put the mirror of God's law before ourselves. We should first see that our prayers are often not as they should be. Do you pray with the same courage and belief that James and John do? They are praying on the promises of God. They remember the word of God and what Jesus said to them. That's great instruction for us in regards to prayer. To know God's word, to pray it back to him, to know what he's promised us. And then to say, God, I want that for me, too. For my family, for my friends, for my enemies. However, in the text today we are shown Jesus, who's not there to condemn us, when our prayers might get a little off course. Jesus is patient and willing to teach James and John and he is patient with us, too. Though we're not too eager on being great in the kingdom of God, Jesus is eager to bring greatness to you in his Kingdom. To make you great in the eyes of our father, even if we might be a little hesitant to be great in his Kingdom, because our sinful flesh doesn't want to be slave to all. Look how he continues to pull James and John along in seeing Him as their greatness. That true greatness is found in Jesus himself. This is why the author to the Hebrews in our second reading goes to such great lengths to say that Jesus prayed, Jesus cried out to God, and it was all on your behalf. That Jesus was a priest, and priests don't live for themselves but for the sake of others. Jesus was the priest that lived his life on our behalf, so that we may not fear.

Jesus lived the perfect life, not for his sake, but for yours. To perfect even our prayers. Your prayers might be a little off, your desires off target, your perspective on what truly greatness in the kingdom of God, it might wander from time to time, but always come back to Jesus. He is our good brother. Always repent and return to God for in trusting Jesus your prayers are made right. Your sins are forgiven. The Holy Spirit sets you back on target. Set your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. He sets your eyes back on what greatness truly is. For He reminds you what he gave you in baptism. He reminds



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you what it is that the body and blood of Jesus given in the sacrament what it means. That it's all by gift. And how great these gifts are. God will show us in the end the greatness that he's bestowed on us.

For Christ Jesus, indeed--if I may--he took the black licorice. Jesus took that which no one could. He took your sins upon Himself, He died on the cross with him. He suffered the father's indignation at your sins. The righteous indignation of God fell on Christ. He took the bad, he took your worst. And now he gives us nothing but the best. The good stuff, forgiveness, life salvation. He corrects our misunderstanding. He teaches that being a slave to others, meaning being in service to others, considering yourself last. That's truly the good life. For He's faithful when you falter. When you fail, he perfects you by His precious blood. Only, don't give up. Keep praying. Keep learning. Keep listening to his word. For greatness in the kingdom, it's a gift, not a merit badge. So pray to Him, call out to Him.

For Christ Jesus is your brother. He'll never offer you poison, he'll never trick you. He's patient. Just as he allowed the brothers James and John to suffer the indignation of others so they might learn, so that they would be perfected. So too with us. We might suffer the indignation of the world because we don't live like them. We don't sound like them. Our perspective, our priorities, it's a little different. We are told finally in Hebrews, that Christ learned obedience through suffering. Doesn't sound good does it? Sounds like slavery. Your brother is trying to teach you what you have in him by faith. The truly sweet life is found in Christ, in whom you are perfected by faith.

And may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.