

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
October 18, 2015  
Pentecost 21  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 53:1-12  
Psalm 91:9-16  
Hebrews 4:12-16  
Mark 10:35-45

Our Gospel lesson today concludes a unit in Mark where Jesus has predicted his passion and death three times, and in all three cases the disciples fail to understand what he means. They are looking for a rough-and-tumble, “take no prisoners” kind of Messiah. A Messiah who reveals his authority by exerting tremendous power over others, especially enemies. A Messiah of brute force and physical intimidation.

Jesus is trying to show them that he is something else altogether. When James and John approach him and ask to be placed in positions of power, he asks them an intriguing question: “are you able to drink the cup that I shall drink, and willing to be baptized with the baptism that I shall undergo?”

Jesus is drawing these images from the Old Testament, where to share the “cup” with someone often meant to share the same fate with another (cf. Psalm 75:8; Is. 51:17-22), and where the image of a flood overwhelming a person was often used as a metaphor for disaster (cf. Ps. 42:7; Is. 43:2).

In asking James and John this question, then, Jesus is clearly pointing to his own suffering and death which is fast approaching, and showing them once again that he is a very different Messiah than what they are expecting. For he is a Messiah who accomplishes God's will not by exerting power *over* others, but by submitting to the power of others -- by suffering and dying a cruel and painful death.

Now Mark's readers would have heard this image of drinking the cup and would have immediately thought of the Eucharist. They would begin to see that sharing the cup of Jesus' suffering meant sharing in his life of humble service to others. They would begin to see that sharing the cup of Jesus in the Eucharist was a sharing of his suffering, and a proclamation of his death. They would begin to see that the Eucharist is a celebration, but a celebration with a twist.

And our partaking of the Eucharist is also a celebration with a twist. The irony is that the heart of our celebration involves *death*. And not just any death, but slow, painful, torturous death. Dying on a Cross carried a real stigma, because as a person hung in the sky, it symbolized that the person was being rejected by both heaven and hell -- suspended between both, accepted by neither.

And yet this instrument of death, the Cross, is the heart of our celebration of the Lord's Supper. In a few short moments we will be lifting up and distributing bread. And as we do so we will be reminded of a body shredded and mangled on a

Cross, a body beaten and bloodied beyond recognition, a body which has taken into itself *our sin, our rebellion, our disobedience*. A body which has seen the pain of our brokenness and lifted it onto itself. A body that sees the black-and-blue bruises we inflict on ourselves when we turn and go our own way, and which takes them unto itself.

And in a few moments we will lift the cup, and we will at this cup is the New Covenant of Christ's blood, shed that our sins might be forgiven. We will be reminded that this blood which gushed forth from his body and spattered onto the ground is the only cure for the sin which infects us and causes us to destroy ourselves and others.

As we take the bread and the cup, we show forth the Lord's death until he comes. His cruel, torturous, undeserved death. His death for wayward, sinful, lost and rebellious ones. His death for *you*, and for *me*.

Holy Communion is a weighty event because of the incredible suffering and horrible torture that lies behind it. But it is a marvelous celebration, too.

Why? Because we were lost, and we have been found and claimed.

We were condemned sinners, and we have been rescued and saved.

We were bloodied and bruised and battered from the pain of past mistakes and poor choices, and Jesus has taken that pain as his own.

We were blind in our spiritual ignorance and arrogance, and Jesus has helped us to see.

We were banished to an eternity without God, and our sentence has been overturned.

What am I trying to say through all of this?

I'm trying to prevent Holy Communion from becoming routine for us.

A few years ago when I used to take Davis to school each day, one day I found myself in the car at the school with Davis, and didn't remember getting there.

Attending church and partaking of the Eucharist can sometimes be like that. If we're not careful, the bread and wine can be something we quaff back quickly on our commute through church, and then the next thing we know we are sitting at home over a cup of coffee, wondering how we got there.

But the Eucharist is more than that. For the Eucharist is the place where we not only proclaim Jesus' death until he comes again, but where we also hear his call to follow him in humble service to others.

As you come to the Table this morning, come with a spirit of awe and wonder at the indescribable sacrifice of Jesus on your behalf. And come also to celebrate the love of God which goes to such lengths to save us. Finally, as you come, listen carefully for the voice of Jesus, which calls to each of us and says: "in

this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the servant of all.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.