

"When Drinking Is the Only Way "
Mark 10:35-45

March 18, 2018

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

We all enjoy drinking various beverages. We fill our cups, tip them back, and enjoy the beverage. However, there may be times when the beverage no longer tastes good, but actually taste horrid. That time is when there is a little something at the bottom of the cup. There's a word for it, "dregs", and it refers to a solid sediment from which the beverage was made. Think of the last sip of coffee you take from a pot which was brewed in a container where the coffee filter it slipped. As you drain the cup, you realize there is a bitter sandy sludge going in your mouth at the same time. However, since some of you die hard coffee drinkers might actually like that, I thought of another example. Think of when you have to take a medicine dissolved in water, like Metamucil. You drink it all down and then there is that terrible yucky gunk waiting for you to swallow. It's not a pleasant experience and it may make you go "oooooh" and gag. While drinking the beverage might be easy and enjoyable, drinking the dregs at the bottom of the cup is not. It can be difficult and unpleasant. We may do the first one rather easily and willingly. However, doing the second is something we might balk at. We may spit out the drink or, when somebody says, "would you like another glass?", we may decline the invitation and not drink again. The same is true in our Gospel reading for today where Jesus speaks of a drink that many say they will drink, but often end up not drinking.

Jesus and His disciples were continuing His ministry in Galilee. Although Jesus had already been very open and transparent about the future of His mission (His suffering and death, and the difficulty of discipleship), it seemed that the disciples were having quite an easy time. They had an easy time traveling around together for three years. They had witnessed many miracles and mountaintop experiences, like Jesus' baptism and His transfiguration. They had heard powerful preaching and teaching from Jesus who spoke as one who had authority and not like the scribes and Pharisees.

Now, they were headed for Jerusalem. Here is where it is all going to get better, they thought. Now Jesus would be handing out the really good stuff. He would show his power and glory, establish an earthly kingdom with Himself as King, he would dismiss the Romans, and make Israel as a world power.

In any country, where a new administration is about to establish a government, people line up to gain appointments to various cushy jobs which will bring them wealth and success. The same was true here. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come up to Jesus and boldly asked Him for a favor. Jesus says, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they replied, "grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." They want to be princes or, as we might say today, Jesus' top two lieutenants in the new administration. As Jesus sat on His grand and glorious throne, one of them would sit at his right hand on a lesser throne and the other would sit on his left hand also under a lesser throne. It just made sense. That's how things were done.

Sometimes we may think the same way as these disciples thought. We may think that this “kingdom of God” and “discipleship” thing is a snap. It’s easy to become a member. You just get baptized, participate in confirmation, and become a full-fledged member. Following Jesus seems to be easy. We have a nice cozy church here with a good number of members. We get together weekly, (less, if we don’t really feel the need or have something different we want to do) in order to be comforted and made happy. We don’t really have to work very hard. There’s always somebody else to do what needs doing. We can simply sit back and soak in the blessings. If we really ambitious, like James and John, we may get a few extra perks thrown in. What’s not to like?

In our text, as James and John were busy visualizing what their new post would be – mentally envisioning their thrones and measuring for the drapes and curtains in their offices, Jesus asked them a simple question, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” James and John, already showing that they were full of themselves, answer, “We are able.” They probably thought that, whatever Jesus was talking about – whatever experience, would be a piece of cake as it had been so far with everything else. Drink from some cup? No problem they thought. We can do this.

However, Jesus wasn’t talking about drinking the sweet and tasty contents in the beginning of the cup – the duties and experiences of discipleship which were easy and even desirable to do. Jesus was talking about drinking all the way to the dregs. As the nasty looking and tasting sediment at the bottom of the cup makes you go “oooooh”, there are many aspects of the biblical cup that make you go “ooh.” The cup of which Jesus spoke is one filled with sin, evil, death. It is not merely distasteful, but it is poison. It is a bitter beverage with deadly dregs. Yet the disciples said they would drink.

Do we think the same as James and John? Do we think that the whole life of discipleship is an easy one designed to enhance our station in life? When we say that we are ready to drink the cup that Jesus drank and be His disciple, do we think that this is an easy thing designed to make us happy? Or do we want the real discipleship – the way that leads to everlasting life? When we get down to the dregs, are we willing to drink?

The disciples said they were willing to drink of the cup which Jesus would drink of – this bitter beverage with deadly dregs – but would they? When it came time for that, they bailed out. One disciple betrayed Jesus. Another disciple denied Jesus. All of them fled when it came time to drink the dregs.

How about you? Are you willing to drink the cup which Jesus drank, including the dregs? When believing in Jesus doesn’t get you everything you wanted and you still experience sickness, sorrow, disappointment, financial difficulty, and so on, do you keep drinking? When being a follower of Jesus Christ puts you on the firing line for our society and causes ridicule, rejection, reputation destruction, and the like or when it leads to, as it might in the coming years, to persecution, loss of possessions, and even loss of life, will you keep on drinking? Will you stop drinking the cup or spit out the dregs?

The way Jesus was going and the cup which He would drink are the one and only way that leads to salvation and everlasting life. All other ways lead to damnation and everlasting death. The cup needs to be drained, but we all seem unable or unwilling to do it.

But, thanks be to God, Jesus was both able and willing to drink of the cup. And he did so for us. It was by no means easy, even for the Son of God. Recall his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus actually asked for this cup to be removed from Him. The beverage of all the sin in the world was bad enough. To drink of that would be horrendous and frightening. However, the dregs of Satan, hell, and everlasting death were even worse. It is no wonder that Jesus ask for such a cup to be removed that he might not have to drink of it. However, Jesus, out of His great love for you, because of His abundant mercy, and by His great desire for you to live, not to die, and to experience everlasting life in heaven instead of eternal death and hell, said to His Father, "But not my will, your will be done."

Jesus drank the cup to the dregs. He drank in all of your sin, my sin, the sin of the world past, present, and future in one huge gulp on the cross. He drank the dregs of Satan's temptations, separation from His Father, and hell itself. He drank every last drop in order to obtain forgiveness for all of your sin, peace with God once more, and the hope of everlasting life in heaven with Him. As He prophesied in our text, "he came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

However, having this eternal salvation does not free us from temporal suffering. We still have to drink from the cup of suffering and pain for being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus said to James and John, "The cup that I drink you will drink." Eleven of Jesus' twelve disciples would lose their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Only John would die of old age. This was not exactly what James and John had in mind when they made the request and certainly not what they expected when they agreed to drink the cup that Jesus would drink..

We, too, if we are faithful in following Jesus Christ will drink the cup of suffering and pain. As we view the situation in our country and in the world regarding the attitude toward Jesus Christ and His followers, we can see this sort of thing coming.

But we do not lose heart, nor do we fear. While pain, suffering, and even death are in the cup, the dregs have been removed. Jesus took on sin, Satan's power, and hell so that we would not have to. Sin no longer condemns us because we've been forgiven. Satan has no power to hurt us or destroy us because Jesus defeated him. Hell will not get us because Jesus has won for us eternal life.

Jesus, after drinking of the cup and dying on the cross and descending into hell, rose again from the dead. He overcame the condemnation of sin. He closed hell to all believers. And he opened the way to everlasting life for all who followed him and drank the same cup. Therefore, we have comfort in the midst of suffering and pain; hope in the midst of persecution; and assurance in the midst of death. Jesus' resurrection from death to life is our hope for and guarantee of our resurrection from death and the grave to life and immortality.

It seems today that some people believe the only way to have fun is to drink, specifically alcoholic beverages. Of course, drinking is not the only way to have fun

and when drinking is viewed as the only way, only bad things can result. However, when I named the sermon, "When Drinking is the Only Way", I was not referring to that. I was referring to the obtaining of forgiveness, life, and salvation. In this situation, drinking is the only way. Jesus drank the cup of sin, death, and the devil for us as the only way to give us forgiveness, life, and salvation. While we will experience many of the same pains, persecutions, and suffering that He did because we are His disciples, the way to heaven, through death and the grave, has been opened we are on the way and, by God's grace, mercy, and strength we will arrive safely home with Him forever. Amen.