

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
March 26, 2017

Like Us in Every Way: Servant of All

1. Which cup to choose?

2. What is your cup?

Matthew 20:17-28

“You must choose... but choose wisely.”

For those of us old enough to remember the 1989 movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, that is a memorable line.

Indiana has gotten into the sanctuary where the last crusader has been guarding the Holy Grail, the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper. The crusader says, “You must choose... but choose wisely.” Trouble is there are lots of cups to choose from. The villain chooses a beautiful gold cup, only to find out it is not the Holy Grail, and he disintegrates into dust. He chose... poorly. Then it is Indiana's turn. Which cup will he choose?

In our lesson for today, Jesus talks about a cup. He asks James and John, “Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?”

“We can!” they answer.

Let's read this lesson with these questions in mind: What is the cup we are to drink? Is it the cup that we would choose?

¹⁷ Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸ “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

²¹ “What is it you want?” he asked.

She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

²² “You don't know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

“We can,” they answered.

²³ Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

*²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—
²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

What was this mother’s goal?

Perhaps she was present when Jesus was speaking at the end of Matthew 19. At the end of a conversation with a rich young man, Peter said, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:27-28).

Thrones! That sounds pretty good to me as a parent. Yes, I’d like my children to sit on thrones. Did she start thinking, “James and John seem to be really tight with Jesus. Maybe they can have even greater honor.”

Is that what James and John had in mind too? When Jesus asks, “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink,” did they say, “Yes, this is the road to greater glory!”

Obviously I can’t read their minds. But I can read mine. And you can read yours.

What would you have been thinking in that situation? “Yes, bring on the cup! I’ll choose the biggest cup, the shiniest cup, because the bigger cup, the greater the glory.”

I would guess that is true for all of us. Wise King Solomon says, “I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another” (Ecclesiastes 4:4). There is just a part of each one of us that says, “I deserve more attention, I deserve more glory.”

- Why is that pastor always being asked to be the speaker at a conference?
- Why is that teammate getting more playing time than I am?
- Why did my co-worker get that assignment and not me?

That is the sad fact of our sinful nature. Life is all about me!

So we want the bigger cup for the greater glory.

But Jesus turns that around and says, “The bigger cup... yes the greater glory... comes with greater service.”

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”

Do you want to be a “somebody” at work? Do you want to be a “somebody” in your family? Do you want to be a “somebody” on the team or in your classroom?

That greater cup comes with greater service.

We see that so clearly in Jesus’ cup, don’t we?

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Yes, Jesus is the greatest in the kingdom... not because he took the glorious route but because he took the servant route. He came to be a servant for people like you and me. Rather than think about himself, he thought about us.

In the movie, Indiana Jones had to choose the cup from which he would drink. But we don’t have to choose the cup we are to drink. We can let God choose. He knows our strengths, our weaknesses. He knows how trouble and sadness, joy and work, will bless those around us. Jesus told James and John: *“You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”*

The disciples were indignant. If only we had asked for those positions of honor before James and John! But the positions of honor, the positions of greater service, are already chosen by God.

In Paul’s letter to the Christians in Ephesus, the second chapter, Paul teaches us that we are saved by grace (thankfully not by how gracefully we drink the cup that God has given us, because we spill that cup and we often grumble and complain about that cup). But we are saved by God’s grace. Then he wrote, “We have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

The pressure is off. You and I don’t have to choose the right cup for us. Jesus will choose! He has prepared in advance the cup that we are to drink.

But what is that cup?

Jesus knew his cup included suffering and victory. He described that cup at the beginning of our reading from Matthew’s Gospel:

¹⁷ Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸ “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

Look into that cup to prepare yourself for your own cup. That cup was to serve. Serve by suffering. Serve even those who didn't appreciate it. Notice that he specifically says that the Gentiles would ridicule him. We heard the fulfillment of this prophecy in our Passion History lesson for today (Matthew 27:27-42).

But also notice that he knows that the victory will be his! The prophecy about his cup ends with “on the third day he will be raised to life.”

Don't miss that. The victory doesn't come as he is drinking the cup. It is after the cup has been drained. After he lies in the tomb, then the victory is his in the resurrection.

So my dear friends, what is the cup that the Lord has chosen for you?

We might envy those who risk their lives to do mission work in North Korea or China or India or Pakistan or Nepal or Indonesia. We might envy the son of our congregation who serves in Malawi or another son of our congregation who is working with New Tribes Mission and is going to a primitive tribe to translate the Bible into a brand new language.

Wow! Those cups are worth drinking. They are glorious!

But God has probably not given those cups to each of us because he knows that right now, we don't have the strength to drink that cup. It may be that we want a cup like that for the wrong reason. Do we want it, not because we can do more service, but we want more glory? That glory seeking will not be enough to deal with the pain and sorrow that comes with drinking these high-profile cups.

What is the cup the Lord has chosen for you?

Here I would encourage you to go to the back of your catechisms. At the back of the catechism is a part that many of us never got to as a kid, “The Table of Duties.” (A copy of the Table of Duties is included at the end of his message.)

What is the cup that the Lord has chosen for you? It is the everyday duties that God has given to you.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ... put the needs of others above my own... in whatever role that God has given me...

As a pastor... to take on the responsibility... the burden that Paul talks about in his second letter to the Christians in Corinth: “I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”²⁹ Who

is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Corinthians 11:28-29). Part of our cup as pastors is to carry on our hearts those who are falling away.

As a congregation... dealing with sinful, weak, imperfect pastors and teachers, sacrificing to support them.

As a citizen, submitting to a government and praying for a government that may frustrate us.

As a husband, loving your wife and sacrificing yourself for her even if she never changes the way she acts toward you.

As a wife, submitting to your husband, looking out for the good of your husband even when he fails to be the husband of your dreams.

As a child, obeying imperfect, over-controlling parents, or parents who get angry or seem to neglect you.

As a parent, loving your children even when they commit life-changing, embarrassing sins.

Employees, doing the best you can for your employer, even though he or she shows favoritism toward your co-workers.

As employers, seeking the good of your employees, even when they assume the worst about you.

Your cup isn't something beautiful and spectacular. It is just very plain. But it is in us drinking from these plain cups that the great works of God are done.

Once in a while, we may see a little glimpse of victory, even as Jesus did in the midst of his suffering. How wonderful it must have been to hear that thief on his right repent and say in faith, "Remember me when you enter into your kingdom." What joy to be able to say, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42,43).

Yes, there are these little glimpses of victory along the way, but the ultimate victory that comes with our cup of service is the confidence that just as surely as Jesus rose from the dead, we too shall rise to a new life.

As we approach the communion rail today, I invite you to come admitting how you have failed to drink the cup that Jesus has given you. Come admitting the envy and bitterness that well up within your heart. Come and see that Jesus is the sin offering that Paul wrote about in our epistle lesson (Romans 8:1-10). Come and place your hands on the communion rail and in your mind place your hands on Jesus and transfer your failure to drink your cup to his head, and remember how he died for you.

Then arise from the Lord's Supper thankful that in this New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), God not only promises to remember your sin no more, he also promises to write his law into your

hearts and minds. He can change your heart so that you are willing and eager to drink the cup that God has given you. He can give you the strength to drink the cup even when it is bitter and painful to drink.

The victory is yours. In Christ, God will accomplish his plan through you. Can we drink the cup that the Father gives to us? In faith, let' us join James and John and shout it out: "We can!"

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Prepared by Pastor Peter Panitzke
414-422-0320, ext. 122
ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org

My Next Steps

- **Seek to better understand your cup:** Read "The Table of Duties" at the end of Martin Luther's Small Catechism. They are on the next page.
- **Confess your failure to drink your cup:** "What should I do if I am not aware of my sins or am not troubled by them? I should examine myself according to the Ten Commandments and ask how well I have carried out my responsibilities as a husband or wife or single person, as a parent or child, an employer or employee, a teacher or student. Have I loved God with all my heart, gladly heard his Word and patiently endured affliction? Have I been disobedient, proud or unforgiving? Have I been selfish, lazy, envious, or quarrelsome?" (*Christian Worship, Personal Preparation for Communion*, page 156)
- **Claim the power of the Lord's Supper to drink your cup:** "I will make a new covenant... I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts... I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Table of Duties

from Luther's Small Catechism

PASTORS

A pastor [overseer NIV] must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. He must not be a recent convert. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (See 1 Timothy 3:2,3,4,6; Titus 1:9.)

WHAT WE OWE TO OUR PASTORS AND TEACHERS

Anyone who receives instruction in the Word must share all good things with his instructor. (See Galatians 6:6.) In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. (See 1 Corinthians 9:14.) The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, [...] "The worker deserves his wages." (See 1 Timothy 5:17,18.) Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. (See Hebrews 13:17.)

GOVERNMENT

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves [...] For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. (See Romans 13:1,2,4.)

HUSBANDS

Husbands, [in the same way] be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. [...] Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. (See 1 Peter 3:7; Colossians 3:19.)

WIVES

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. (See Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:6.)

PARENTS

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. (See Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21.)

CHILDREN

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother--which is the first commandment with a promise---that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (See Ephesians 6:1-3.)

EMPLOYEES

[Slaves] Obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does. (See Ephesians 6:5-8.)

EMPLOYERS

[And masters,] Treat your [slaves] employees in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. (See Ephesians 6:9.)

YOUNG PEOPLE

Young men, be submissive to those who are older. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (See I Peter 5:5,6.)

WIDOWS

The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. (See I Timothy 5:5,6.)

A WORD FOR ALL

Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the sum of all the commandments. (See Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14.) And continue praying for everyone. (See I Timothy 2:1.)

Let each his lesson learn with care, and all the household well shall fare.