

9-18-11

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST. The text Mt 20:17-28

7] WHEN JESUS WAS ABOUT TO GO UP TO JERUSALEM, HE TOOK THE TWELVE [APOSTLES] ASIDE ON THE ROAD AND TOLD THEM: 18] "LISTEN. WE'RE GOING UP TO JERUSALEM, AND THE SON OF MAN IS GOING TO BE GIVEN UP TO THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND LAW TEACHERS, AND THEY'RE GOING TO CONDEMN HIM TO DEATH, 19] AND GIVE HIM UP TO GENTILES TO MOCK AND FLOG AND CRUCIFY, AND ON THE THIRD DAY, HE'S GOING TO BE RAISED."

20] THEN THE MOTHER OF ZEBEDEE'S SONS CAME TO HIM WITH HER SONS. SHE BOWED LOW AND ASKED A FAVOR OF HIM. 21] "WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE?" HE ASKED HER. SHE SAID, "SAY THAT IN YOUR KINGDOM, THESE TWO SONS OF MINE WILL SIT, ONE ON YOUR RIGHT AND THE OTHER ON YOUR LEFT."

22] BUT JESUS ANSWERED THEM, "YOU TWO DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ASKING. CAN YOU DRINK FROM THE CUP THAT I'M ABOUT TO DRINK FROM MYSELF?" "WE CAN," THEY SAID. 23] HE TOLD THEM, "YOU WILL DRINK FROM MY CUP. BUT SITTING ON MY RIGHT AND LEFT - THAT'S NOT MINE TO GIVE. THAT'S FOR THE ONES MY FATHER PREPARED IT FOR."

24] WHEN THE OTHER TEN HEARD ABOUT THIS, THEY WERE ANGRY WITH THE TWO BROTHERS, 25] BUT JESUS CALLED THEM TO HIM AND SAID, "YOU KNOW HOW THE RULERS OF THE GENTILES LORD IT OVER THEM, AND THEIR IMPORTANT MEN MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR AUTHORITY OVER THEM? 26] THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS WITH YOU. WHOEVER WANTS TO BECOME IMPORTANT AMONG YOU WILL BECOME YOUR SERVANT, 27] AND WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST WILL BE YOUR SLAVE, 28] JUST AS THE SON OF MAN DIDN'T COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE IN RANSOM FOR MULTITUDES."

Long ago and in a very different world, Somebody Huge SAW ALL THAT HE HAD MADE AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD. Somebody Huge looked at the first of us and said, "BEHOLD, they are VERY GOOD." We still want to hear that, even in our present condition. The trouble is, we want to be the Somebody Huge who says it.

Understand, if it's about pleasing people that we ought to please, as when a kid asks his Dad, "Did I do good?" – that's actually humble and sweet. What's sad and worse is how much we want most of all to please ourselves and say it to ourselves: BEHOLD, I am VERY GOOD. But WHOEVER EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLED; whoever justifies himself will be condemned. What we long to hear doesn't come by saying, "How about me?" Or in the case Zebedee's sons, James and John, "How about us?"

VV. 17-18] WHEN JESUS WAS ABOUT TO GO UP TO JERUSALEM, HE TOOK THE TWELVE [APOSTLES] ASIDE ON THE ROAD AND TOLD THEM: "LISTEN. WE'RE GOING UP TO JERUSALEM, AND THE SON OF MAN - which means, *The Man*,

Mr. Human Race, Adam II, the Best we've got, the Man about whom in this world Someone Huge said, IN YOU I AM WELL PLEASED – He's GOING TO BE GIVEN UP TO THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND LAW TEACHERS. The Best There Ever Was of Us IS GOING TO BE GIVEN UP TO them AND THEY'RE GOING TO CONDEMN the Son of Man, the Man to whom God said, BEHOLD, THOU ART VERY GOOD – THEY'RE GOING to tell Him, THOU SHALT DIE, as if they were God and He were Adam and V. 19] they're going to GIVE HIM UP TO GENTILES TO MOCK AND FLOG AND CRUCIFY The Best of Us There Ever Was, AND ON THE THIRD DAY, He said, I'm GOING TO BE RAISED!"

But it seems that while He was saying that, James and John weren't listening. They kind of had their own relationship with Jesus, deep down in their hearts that didn't have much to do with what He actually said. That's pretty common. Right then, it seems they were thinking deep down in those hearts of theirs, "When He's King, maybe we can be like Prime Minister and Secretary of State or something. That would be great."

Because, next thing, V. 20] their MOTHER was there with them. Her name was Salome and she CAME TO JESUS with them, and SHE BOWED LOW AND ASKED HIM FOR A FAVOR. And V. 21] Jesus said to that sweet lady, "WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE?" And SHE SAID, "SAY THAT IN YOUR KINGDOM, THESE TWO SONS OF MINE WILL SIT, ONE ON YOUR RIGHT AND THE OTHER ON YOUR LEFT. Which means, "Say that they'll have the top two jobs in Your administration."

Who put her up to that? Her boys put her up to that. And you can tell, because V. 22] JESUS ANSWERED her *boys*, not her. He said, "YOU – it's plural – YOU two DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ASKING. Because you don't hear what I say: I am bringing in the new administration on a Cross. CAN YOU DRINK FROM THE CUP THAT I'M ABOUT TO DRINK FROM MYSELF?" Can you drink death enough for the sins of the world? Can you swallow innocent suffering so huge it purifies to the uttermost? "WE CAN," THEY SAID. Although, be fair, all they meant was, "We can be whatever we've got to be as long as we get to be big."

V. 24] WHEN THE OTHER TEN HEARD ABOUT THIS, were they grieved that John and James were still so sick with sin? No they weren't. Were they stunned that those two could care about who's first, when Christ was on His way to the nails? No they weren't. How about, WHEN THE OTHER TEN HEARD ABOUT THIS, THEY were fit to die laughing, cause they couldn't *believe* that old James and John made their *Mom* go and try and get *jobs* for them? No. THE OTHER TEN WERE ANGRY WITH THE TWO BROTHERS - for trying to get a jump on the rest of them.

When He'd just taken THEM ALL ASIDE AND TOLD THEM, so they'd be prepared for His death, to break it to them gently, so they wouldn't panic when they watched the atrocities being committed against Him. But it seems they weren't as upset about that as they might have

been. The only thing that had *them* worried was, when the dust settled, which of them was going to be the biggest *shot*, so he could tell himself, “Man, you’re good.”

Actually, though, as I say, the truth was worse. Actually, He stood there telling them face to face about His arrest and torture and execution, and they didn't hear a word. Sorry. They were thinking of something else. We pretty often *are* thinking of something else, or rather, someone else, namely, ourselves.

Why do we care if somebody gets treated as if they’re more important than we are? We say we don't, but we pretty regularly do, and since Mim Keurulainen is in Heaven now, that’s the truth about most of us here this morning.

Why do I care who gets the credit as long as something good gets *done*? I'm not talking about at your job, when they won't pay you fairly for what you do. Make a squawk; tell your shop steward. And I’m not talking about asking for the kind of feed back that lets you know you're doing your job. No, I mean the mere credit; I mean, just so that people know I’m good.

I know we need to be noticed. But Somebody really Huge notices me! Why isn't that enough? Because it's not the need to be noticed; it's the lust to be noticed more than somebody else. And it’s the lust to be noticed not by God, but by the one I notice most, namely me. Unlike Salome’s boys, I never recruited my mother, God rest her soul, to get me noticed. Anybody else, sure. Anybody else who'd listen. Oh, I can say it sly. I can just sort of imply it and let people draw the conclusion for themselves. And still get across how good I am, how busy I get, how hard I work, how much I do.

Unlike some others. Not that we're saying we're better or more spiritual or more hardworking than anybody else. We're just *saying*. And saying, and saying. I wonder if anybody a minute ago said to themselves, "Mim Keurulainen wasn't perfect!" And is anybody saying now, “I would *never* think that and I want you to *know* that I would never think that”? And not that we want to be number one – much – but like those other 10 Apostles, it can just, you know, get to you how people think that other people are so terrific, when you could tell them a thing or two about those other people. In fact, Christ didn't want to live without those other people, but we know a thing or two about them and it can be hard to keep that thing or two inside our mouths.

It's the coiling. Jesus can stand here – well, He is standing here – with His scars, back from His Cross and telling *us* heart to heart about His arrest and execution, and who it was for, and how He thinks that you, in your present condition, were the greatest bargain in the world, and us not hear a word He's saying. Sorry. We were thinking of something else. Maybe something like, who's getting the attention? Who's getting the credit? Who gets to sit on the right and the left?

As a matter of fact, you guys are the humblest and most loving Christians I've ever known. Which makes it worse. Those TEN men, who were so ANGRY at the two who acted like jerks that they acted like jerks *themselves* - they were Holy Apostles. Which makes it worse. And Holy Apostle or me or precious you: this sin can kill our souls. Because it can make us *deaf to Jesus*. To where He says, "HUMBLE YOURSELF." And we can say, "Certainly, but what about *them*? I'm just saying." To where He does say, "GIVE UP YOUR LIVES FOR EACH OTHER." And we can say, "Fine, but who's going to give up *his* life for *me*?" Oh. That's right.

Jesus spoke words of life to Caiaphas and to Pilate and to Judas, but they didn't hear, because they were each thinking of something else: Caiaphas was thinking about who was high priest and Pilate was thinking about who was governor and Judas was thinking about how none of the *other* Apostles had thirty pieces of silver. And they're all damned, even though they were once only inches from the One who thought they were more important than the world. But they didn't listen. And the rest of the Apostles could have gone the same way. And so could we.

BUT V. 25] JESUS CALLED THEM! JESUS CALLED THEM TO HIM, the same way He's calling us now. AND HE SAID, "YOU KNOW HOW THE RULERS OF THE GENTILES LORD IT OVER THEM, AND THEIR IMPORTANT MEN MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR AUTHORITY? He says, "That's how it is for people who don't know anything but the way of the world as it spins down the drain, for people who are under the old administration of sin and death and Hell. BUT under the new administration, not under sin, death, and Hell, but under *Me*, He says, V. 26] THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS WITH YOU.

He did *not* say, "THAT'S NOT HOW it's *supposed* to be WITH YOU." He did not say, "THAT'S NOT HOW it *better* be with you." He said, "THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS. Because MINE don't LORD IT OVER each other, and MINE don't grab for AUTHORITY, and you're Mine, and the way it is with *Mine* is, WHOEVER WANTS TO BECOME IMPORTANT AMONG YOU WILL BECOME YOUR SERVANT. Hear that, James? AND, in case John wasn't listening, V. 27] WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST WILL BE YOUR *SLAVE* just like *Me*." Just like Him on His knees washing their feet – the Son of Man, *The Man*, Adam II, the Best we've got – the One to whom God said, BEHOLD, Thou art VERY GOOD. Jesus said, "That's the One who's GOING TO BE GIVEN UP – The Best There's Ever Been of Us, as if He were the worst of us, and the least of us, and the last of us, and the lowest of us: V. 28] JUST AS THE SON OF MAN DIDN'T COME TO *BE* SERVED, BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE IN RANSOM. THAT, He said, THAT'S HOW IT IS WITH YOU.

He *refused* to notice the sin; it must have driven Satan wild. It still drives Satan's people wild. But Christ refused to notice their sin, since He was about to notice it *plenty* for them and all of us, as the last Victim there ever has to be of the old administration of sin and death. Jesus Christ was the last Man who ever has to be damned. Now He's RAISED AGAIN FOR *OUR* JUSTIFICATION, the same as He justified them when He told them, "I know the sins of the whole lost world, but THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS WITH YOU. +

We justify the others because He justifies us. We exalt the others because He exalts us. So the Holy Spirit says, FOR *LOVE'S SAKE*, COUNT THE OTHERS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOU, just like the One you belong to. Because He actually *did* care whether somebody was more important than Him: He insisted that *you* were the important thing, and that He was dispensable as long as you're safe. Jesus is the SON OF MAN, the Best we've got, and He *cares* who gets the credit. He insists that *we* get the credit for everything He's been through and everything He's done, every day we live and into Paradise. That's not just what you want. That's not just what your mother wants for you.

That's what God wants and what He gave His Son to get. It's justification: It's Somebody Huge telling us in our present condition for Jesus' sake, BEHOLD, You are VERY GOOD. It's not the way of the world by a long shot. It's the way of the world to come. It's the new administration. And the instant we actually listen to Christ and turn around and believe Him, we're in the new administration. Not UNDER LAW BUT UNDER GRACE, which is why, instead of dissolving Salome's boys right there on the tarmac, He said, THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS WITH YOU and covered them with His own spectacular goodness by that Absolution.

And then HE TOLD THEM, V. 23]"SITTING ON MY RIGHT AND LEFT IN MY KINGDOM - THAT'S NOT MINE TO GIVE. Look who's meek! He said, SITTING ON MY RIGHT AND LEFT IN MY KINGDOM, THAT'S FOR THE ONES MY FATHER PREPARED IT FOR." Which, just to satisfy your insatiable curiosity, *could* be Adam and Eve. Or maybe some murderer who repents on death row and the woman taken in adultery, which would be *typical* for Him. Or maybe even Salome's boys to their own everlasting surprise – which would be so *very* typical of Him, since every last seat there is by grace alone: The FATHER PREPARED them all. So Jesus TOLD THEM, "SITTING ON MY RIGHT AND LEFT - THAT'S already arranged. But as for you, and as for you, and you, and you: V. 23] YOU WILL DRINK FROM MY CUP.

And He couldn't have meant death by torture, because St. John died in bed of old age. And anyway, YOU ARE not *ABLE TO DRINK THE CUP* He DRANK Himself. *Still*, as He promised Salome's boys and their mother, too, YOU WILL DRINK death enough for the sins of the world – it's the death of Jesus in the CUP for you. And YOU WILL swallow innocent suffering so huge it purifies to the uttermost – it's the innocent suffering of the SON OF MAN in the CUP for us.

As He told His Apostles, DRINK MY CUP: not the CUP He drained, but the CUP He filled – which is grace abounding for the worst and the least and the last and the lowest as if we were the best and greatest and first and highest: As if we were Christ. TAKE, DRINK and listen, listen, listen to Somebody Huge saying for Jesus' sake: IN YOU I AM WELL-PLEASED. In your present condition, yet, BEHOLD, you are VERY GOOD. And then let's stand up and turn around and show the others that they're worth dying for. Amen.