

## How Dare They?

Mark 10:35-45

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

March 18, 2018 – Fifth Sunday in Lent



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. What in the world were James and John up to when they came to Jesus and pleaded that He do for them whatever they asked? What gave them the right to demand such preferential treatment from our Lord? “How dare they?” you might ask, as with the disciples we all join in pointing our wagging fingers at them. It’s obvious that they had been overtaken by a dose of covetousness – and they most certainly were violating the First, and maybe the Second Commandment. They definitely were not loving God above all things, nor their neighbor or fellow disciples as themselves. Aren’t you glad you haven’t fallen into *that* sin?

Well, perhaps we all ought to be asking ourselves: “How dare we?” – for this message of Jesus needs to be heard by more than just the Twelve, because James and John weren’t all that different from us modern-day followers of Jesus! Most of us have “put in” our years of service to the Church. We’ve listened to lots of sermons – good and bad. We think we’ve learned something about how to judge doctrine. We are Lutherans, after all! We may sing better or louder than others, play the organ, handbells, or some other instrument, teach Sunday school, organize VBS, run the LWML, track down extra money through Thrivent to help others when they need it, clean bathrooms, balance the books, rake, mow, clip, chop, read, write, or study – did I leave anyone out? – all which makes it fairly easy for us to confuse *these things* with being Jesus’ disciples. And to compound this, we judge others, comparing them to ourselves.

Just as the men in “My Fair Lady” once sang: “Why Can’t a Woman Be More Like a Man?” we grumble to God, saying: “Why can’t Old So-And-So be a better Christian – like me?” Or else, catching someone else in the throes of self-righteous pride, we join in with the indignant disciples: “Lord, why don’t *You* put Old So-And-So in their place?” To this behavior, the words of Jesus arrest our attention: “You do not know what you are asking.” The Kingdom of Heaven is not where you go to be lifted up, nor put others in their place. And if you do this, Jesus re-

minds us, “you don’t know what you’re asking.” How dare we presume to do these things?

Jesus says that “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.” So why don’t we just put an end to all this self-exaltation, quit our comparing, suck it up, and start serving one another full-time – and joyfully? Why, indeed? God made us so that He might serve and supply us with all our needs. Likewise, service to Him and to one another is what we were created and commissioned to do “in the beginning.” But Adam and Eve decided self-service was better than either serving or being served by God. So they dared to challenge His Word and plan, then complained about serpent, woman, and even about God Himself. They denied the special honor of their place in creation and sought honor for themselves. Yet those who would be truly great in the Kingdom are those who serve with the least thought of self. And *here* we are all in trouble, for there isn’t a single one of us who would dare give up ourselves to the extent Jesus speaks of here.

It’s difficult enough to be a part-time servant in the Church. It’s harder still to put family ahead of self in our day-to-day decisions. As you go out into the world, the degree of difficulty increases as Jesus clobbers us all with His simple statement that “whoever would be first among you *must* be slave of all.” As we ponder that Word and compare it to ourselves, we realize the opposite is closer to the truth: that we are least in the kingdom because we rarely – if ever – are the slave of anyone! How dare we even show up for Sunday worship, pray to our Father in Heaven, trust that He will answer us, or presume to have *any* good thing come to us from Him?

Dare I say it? We dare because Jesus dared. The cup of wrath He drank in His suffering and death was the punishment for us daring to put ourselves before God and passing by our neighbor in need. We come boldly before the throne of God, claiming our inheritance as sons, because the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. As God, He dared to become man. As Creator, He dared to become a creature. As the Im-

mortal One, He dared to suffer death to take our sin and death away. He always looked to do His Father's bidding – always – and never dared step out on his own.

James, along with the other disciples – save Judas – *would* one day see the fulfillment of Jesus' determination to "drink the cup" down to the last bitter drop. Our Lord Christ would be betrayed by one, denied by another, and abandoned by all – yes, even His Father. Yet even as He cried out: "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He also prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When Jesus came into His ultimate glory, giving Himself on the cross as the sin-offering for all, it wasn't James and John who were on His right and left hand in His glory. Instead, it was two convicted felons who occupied that place of "honor." Yet Christ promised His cup would also be the cup of His disciples, even as would be His Baptism of abandonment and death. John would be sent into exile. James would be beheaded. And the other disciples would also taste of this cup as they went to their death with Jesus' Word on their lips. Even to the present day, suffering for the Gospel is a mark of the One True Church.

Still, an even greater participation in Jesus' Baptism belonged to them and to us. As St. Paul reminded the Roman Christians: "Do you not know that all of us who have been Baptized into Christ Jesus were Baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Our old, sinful nature, our pride, our daring to replace God and forget our neighbor, were also crucified with Christ on Calvary.

"He saved us, not by deeds of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy – by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." Jesus dared to be merciful to us poor sinners, even when He knew it would lead to His death. But now, because He has been raised from the dead by the Glory of the Father, we now are privileged to participate in this "newness of life" as we drink of that cup in the Holy Communion, and participate in the death of Christ for our sins.

There we eat His crucified body and drink His crucified blood given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins – as we participate in the new covenant in His blood.

Have you noticed how, for the past few minutes, we haven't been looking at ourselves and others? The Word, you see, the Word is what leads us away from the poison of comparison and focuses our eyes rather on Him who is Slave – who promises both eternal life and the very real possibility of pain and suffering here on earth. Yet through Christ's Word and blessed Sacrament, we have been strengthened so that we no longer rely upon ourselves. By the power of the Holy Spirit we surrender ourselves by recognizing His surrendering of Himself for us – that He is living in us as our Servant King, doing the good our Old Adam rebels against.

Because of all this, we dare to call God "Our Father" – to come to Him asking for both eternal and temporal blessings – to live as God's beloved children who are willing to surrender ourselves for others – taking the chance that we'll be hurt, do without, or lose something in the process. This we do because we dare to believe that none of the things of this life really matter in the end, and that nothing – absolutely nothing – is more important than the forgiveness of sins and the eternal life we already possess. We dare live the Christian life because our Lord and Savior dared to live and die for us – to give us His perfect obedience and never-failing service.

And when our service fails, our faith flickers, or our old sinful nature gains the upper hand – which it most certainly will – we also dare to return once again to our merciful, Giver-God, who has promised to receive and forgive sinners. It is He who dares to forget our past, blot out our sins, and remembers them no more. Through His work on Calvary's bloody cross to save sinners, He dares invite us to be forgiven and to live with Him forever in heaven. And it is precisely for this reason that we know it will always be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.