

Introductory

The first section of this text (vv. 32-34) has parallels in Matthew (20:17-19) and in Luke (18:31-34). The second section (vv. 35-45) has a parallel in Matthew (20:20-28), but not in Luke. In the TLH lectionary, Luke 18:31-43 is appointed to be read on Quinquagesima Sunday. In LW, Matthew 20:17-28 is appointed to be read on Lent 4A.

When considering the approach to preaching on this text, the first thing we note is that there are actually two texts here; the one where Jesus tells of His coming Crucifixion and subsequent Resurrection, and the one that follows, where Mark relates to us the incident where James and John – Matthew says their mother was involved – make their request.

You can decide if you're going to preach on just one of those text, and if so, then which one, or if you will preach on both of them. There appears to be a spiritual mood swing between the one and the other. When Jesus and the others are going to Jerusalem, they seem to be almost paralyzed with fear at the thought of what will happen there.

How do those sons of Zebedee go from being part of that group to becoming a pair that boldly asks Jesus for places of honor in His Glory? On some level, the request of The Sons of Thunder indicates a certain confidence or belief in Jesus. It's odd, but then Christians today sometimes go from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde in a heartbeat.

At the beginning of the tenth chapter of Mark, we find Jesus moving from Galilee to "the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan." While there, He teaches about marriage, blesses children who have been brought to Him, talks to the rich young ruler, which brings us to today's text. We find Jesus and His merry band now deliberately headed for Jerusalem.

He has been there before, but this time it will be different.

Textual Notes

Verses 32-34

32. Mark now tells us that "ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἀναβαίνοντες εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα – they were on the road, going up into Jerusalem." By "they" he means Jesus and disciples, but as we read on, we see that Mark makes sure to tell us the order in which they travelled; "ἦν προάγων αὐτοὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς – Jesus is leading them" and they are following Him, which is normal.

The preposition "εἰς" followed by the noun "Jerusalem" in the accusative case indicates motion into; the emphasis here is on actually going *into* the city. The participle προάγων,

from the verb προάγω, is a word that literally means “to go ahead of,” and in this case it means that Jesus out in front of them, and He decides the destination of the entire group.

Probably they did not need a map to know where they were headed. They were fully aware of which road they were on, and where they were headed, and what awaited them when they got there, and that’s why they don’t want to go there. They know what is going to happen because Jesus has already told them what is going to happen – twice.

It says of those disciples that “ἐθαμβοῦντο, οἱ δὲ ἀκολουθοῦντες ἐφοβοῦντο – the (ones) following were astonished and afraid.” The first word “ἀκολουθοῦντες,” a present active participle that means “following.” Jesus was “leading – προάγων,” and they were “following – ἀκολουθοῦντες,” which is, of course, the way that it’s supposed to be.

It also says of those who were following the leader that they were “ἐθαμβοῦντο - astonished” and “ἐφοβοῦντο – afraid.” In short order, one after another, those two verbs give us a very vivid picture of the emotional state of those who were following their Leader up to Jerusalem, and in a general way the way it often is for all Christians.

The first verb, “θαμβέω,” indicates that something has happened that has knocked their socks off. It is rare in the NT, and it only occurs three times in Mark; here, in 1:27, the response of the people when Jesus had cast out demons, and just before this, in 10:24 when Jesus tells them the bad news that it is hard for rich people to get into heaven.

The lexicon definition at biblos.com, quoting from Vine, Unger, and White says it best; “to astonish, amaze (passive, dumbfounded) to the point of becoming emotionally stalled (“shutting down”) – also implying a sense of wonder or terror.” That word, together with “φοβέομαι – fear,” and these men are following Jesus, but it’s not an easy thing to do.

Some manuscripts couple the word (astonish) with physical “trembling” in Acts 9:6 to describe Paul when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Luke uses the cognate noun three times (4:36, 5:9, Acts 3:10) in the context of what we might call highly charged emotional situations. What was the cause of their angst? They knew where this road led.

Put yourself in their shoes. On some level they liked and admired Jesus, and I suspect that Jesus was a really likeable guy. Each one of them had left whatever they had to follow Him. They had heard what He had to say, and they had seen what He had done, and it was all very exciting for them, and He had chosen each of them personally.

What a horrifying thing it must have been now to think that Jesus was serious about this “going to Jerusalem.” Before this, when He said it the first two times, they may have been able to go to their happy place and not dwell on what was coming, but now that He is actually on that road to there, the reality of what will happen there has come to them.

Noting their trepidation, Jesus tells them one more time that what is going to happen, and soon; “ἤρξατο αὐτοῖς λέγειν τὰ μέλλοντα αὐτῷ συμβαίνειν – He began to tell them the

things that were about to happen to Him.” The word “μέλλοντα – about to” carries with it the idea of something impending, as in these things are going to happen “pretty soon.”

33. This is the third time (the others are 8:31-33 and 9:30-32) that Jesus has told his followers that they were going to go Jerusalem and what was going to happen when they got there; that He would suffer and die, and that He would rise from the dead. After the first time He said it, Peter famously rebuked Him and infamously got called “Satan.”

When He said it the second time, Mark tells us that they did not understand what He was talking about, and they were afraid to ask Him for clarification. It is understandable that they did not want to ask for clarification. Clearly, this was to Jesus an important issue, and just as clearly, He did not seem to welcome any input from them on the matter.

For the third time, Jesus once more talks to them about betrayal and death. First, He says, He will be “παραδοθήσεται τοῖς ἀρχιερεῦσιν καὶ τοῖς γραμματεῦσιν – handed over to the Chief Priests and the Scribes.” These words describe what would – what should – happen to one accused of great wrongdoing, and He will be accused of great wrongdoing.

The idea that Jesus, who is without sin, would be handed over to that body was beyond the pale. But what He told them next was absolutely unthinkable. He told them that their church leaders, who made up the church court, would “παραδώσουσιν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν – hand Him over to the Gentiles,” and He will be handed over to Pontius Pilate, Gentile.

Most likely, Judas had made his choice long ago and Jesus had already figured it out. If you’ve ever been the parent of a teenager, then you know that the parent knows when something is up with the child. John tells us that Jesus said (6:70-71) of them “one of you is a devil” and that when He said that “He spoke of Judas...was to betray Him.”

In his most excellent book, *The First Easter*, Paul Maier talks about what we would call “wanted” posters posted throughout Judea by the religious leaders; “Wanted, Jesus of Nazareth for sorcery...” It seems reasonable to think that Jesus would have known about that as well. Judas will hand Him over to the religious leaders, the first betrayal.

Then will come another betrayal. Those religious leaders will hand Him over to the Romans; “the Gentiles.” Maier also notes that the Jews had, only a few years before this, had lost the right to execute criminals. Since Jesus knows that He is going to be killed, He would have also known that His death would come at Roman hands, not Jewish.

34. You don’t have to pay all that much attention to warfare to know that war is violent, and that soldiers can be very violent. They may even do things that they never would have thought themselves able to do when civilians. When war comes into contact with civilians, those civilians often become victims of men who have become violent men.

Violent men are also much more likely to do violence against people who are not like them than against their own countrymen. These Roman soldiers lived in a violent world,

were accustomed to violence, and they found themselves far from home and in a place that they generally hated, working among people who generally hated them.

The soldiers are under the command of Pontius Pilate, and they will “ἐμπαΐξουσιν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐμπτύσουσιν αὐτῷ καὶ μαστιγώσουσιν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσιν – mock Him, and spit upon Him, and flog Him, and kill.” These are all future verbs, and the flogging is the kind done by strapping the victim to a pole and whaling on Him with the serious whip.

Each time, when He has talked about dying, Jesus has talked also of living again, specifically, that “μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται. – after three days He will rise.” The hearers are always non-responsive to that. What do you say to a guy who seems determined to go to a place of abuse and death, and who talks about rising from the dead?

(Verses 35-45)

35. Or I suppose we could take the action and words of twin fishermen as a response. Right after Jesus spoke such of death and resurrection, “προσπορεύονται αὐτῷ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωάννης οἱ υἱοὶ Ζεβεδαίου – James and John, sons of Zebedee, came forward.” The verb is “προσπορεύομαι,” and it’s a hapax in the NT, which always gets my attention.

Citing this verse and some secular literature, BAG defines the word as “come up to, approach,” and apparently MM and BAG were reading each other. The word is a compound, and the first part “προς” with the dative means location beside. The Sons of Zebedee, who had been following behind Jesus, now move up and walk alongside Him.

The body language would indicate that they are with Him or is it that they consider themselves somehow his equal. Or perhaps we’re reading too much into the body language. Maybe they just want to talk to Him, calling Him “Διδάσκαλε – teacher,” a word that is complimentary and accurate. But it is not the more respectful “rabbi.”

They don’t ask Him, but they tell Him, “θέλομεν ἵνα ὃ ἐὰν αἰτήσωμέν σε ποιήσης ἡμῖν – we want that whatever we ask of you, you should do it for us.” These two first cousins of Jesus, who had just been in the group that is described as being almost paralyzed with fear, now make this outlandish statement, and they’re going somewhere with this.

My translation of this not untranslatable but difficult to translate sentence does not do justice to just how over the top this statement – request, demand – actually is. They covered all the bases, making sure that Jesus knows that what they are telling Him they want is to be able to ask for anything, anything at all, and then He will do it for them.

Their statement contains two verbs that are in the subjunctive mood, the word “ἐάν – if,” the pronoun “ὅ – whatever, anything,” and the pronoun “σε – you.” They sound a lot like four-year-old twins who tell their parents; we want that whatever we tell you to do, if we tell you do something, if we tell you to do anything, you will do that thing for us. Okay?

You almost get the idea that these two are funnin' with Cousin Jesus, but that's a slippery slope, so I'm going to stay off of it. Like the four-year-old twins, who are setting mom and dad up for what they know to be an outlandish request. They have left the pack and come up to Jesus for a reason; to ask Him for something, and they are about to do that.

36. Jesus says to them, using the same words that made up the statement of the two, except for all those words that made their statement outlandish, “Τί θέλετε με ποιήσω ὑμῖν – what do you want me to do for you?” Some of the commentaries seem to think that Jesus already knew for what they were going to ask. Maybe He did. He is Jesus.

37. And they said to Jesus, “Δὸς ἡμῖν ἵνα εἴς σου ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ εἴς ἐξ ἀριστερῶν καθίσωμεν ἐν τῇ δόξῃ σου – Give to us that one of us at your right hand, and one of us at your left hand we might sit in your glory.” We saw that coming, didn't we, and that is indeed an outlandish request. But He had personally chosen them, and it is family.

For context, we circle back to what happened right before this. After the encounter with the rich man, Peter observed “we have left everything and followed you,” implying the question what's in it for us? Jesus spoke to them about their reward, ending with “the first will be last, and the last first.” He also speaks of “twelve thrones” (19:28) for them.

We further note here that when Jesus said to these twelve there would be twelve thrones waiting for those twelve men, He doesn't say that those twelve thrones would be the *only* thrones. He is not placing a limitation on the number of thrones in heaven. The significance of that is that there may well be “thrones” for all Christians in heaven.

But enough about who gets thrones in heaven, or not.

So, Jesus talks about thrones in heaven, and He tells the Twelve that one is reserved for each one of them, then He talks about the coming Crucifixion and subsequent Resurrection, and it's like He didn't say those things we just heard Him say. For fun, read through v 31, omit vv. 32 – 34, pick it up at v. 35 and that narrative flows nicely.

James and John – Matthew says their mother was involved – are not content to be just two of the twelve on those thrones. They want to make sure they get the best thrones; the two located closest to Jesus. I have heard other Christians express such a hope. That's not a good look and it comes off as very arrogant, as these two are about to find out.

But enough about who gets the best thrones in heaven, or not.

38. Jesus explains to these two that they don't understand what all is entailed in what they are asking. First, He tells them straight up; “αὐτοῖς Οὐκ οἶδατε τί αἰτεῖσθε – you don't know for what you ask.” In the form of a question, those words of Jesus to them would read, “don't you know for what you ask?” expecting a positive answer; yes, we know.

He follows up with a rhetorical question, “δύνασθε πιεῖν τὸ ποτήριον ὃ ἐγὼ πίνω, ἢ τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθῆναι – are you able to drink the cup which I drink, and (receive) the Baptism with which I am baptized?” The verb “to drink” is πιεῖν, an aorist active infinitive of a very common word, with emphasis on the act of drinking.

The idiom “to drink the cup” has come down to us today, although it is not very often used. Cup as metaphor is used fairly frequently in the OT to indicate God’s interaction with man. In the OT, drinking from the cup often means a good thing, as in the cup of salvation, but more often it means a bad thing, as in the cup of God’s wrath or fury.

Throughout Scripture, as in the ancient Near East, the cup functions as a metaphor for an individual's fate. In Psalm 16, the psalmist credits the Lord with assigning his "portion and cup" in life. Psalm 23 equates an abundant life with an overflowing cup, a potent image in a semiarid world. The culmination of the positive image of the cup is in Psalm 116. Here the psalmist raises the cup of salvation as a thank offering to God, in effect offering the sum of his life to his lord.

The metaphor of the cup, like life itself, can also be negative. In numerous prophetic works, the cup retains its role as a representative of fate, but on a national level. The cup can function as a cup of wrath, a vessel pouring out God's judgment on the nations. The nations drinking from the "cup of his wrath" are often depicted as lost in drunkenness. Isaiah 51:17 personifies Jerusalem as a woman who drained the cup of wrath to its dregs. God takes pity on his city and intervenes. "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger the goblet of my wrath" (v. 22). This cup is then given to the tormentors, indicating that they will suffer in their turn.

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/cup/>

The idiom about being baptized has not come down to us, and is not common in the OT, but here, like drinking of His cup, being baptized with His baptism are both references to suffering and the cross, things that are allotted to Jesus, and to every person who has ever followed Him. In Romans 6, Paul makes a connection between Baptism and Crucifixion.

39. And, surprisingly I think, they said, “Δυνάμεθα – we can do that,” and He said, “Τὸ ποτήριον ὃ ἐγὼ πίνω πίεσθε, καὶ τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθήσεσθε – the cup I drink, you will drink, and the Baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized,” and they did. Not at first. At first, they ran away and hid. After Pentecost, they did.

James the Greater was one of the first to have been chosen by Jesus, and he had heeded the bidding, left his family, and followed Jesus. In Acts 12:1 we see him caught up in a flurry of Herod’s violence and “killed with the sword,” probably beheading. His brother John the Apostle likewise dropped his nets alongside those of James when the Savior bid.

John suffered much and was often the victim of persecution, but according to tradition he was twice dipped in boiling oil to kill him, and it didn't, so they stopped doing that. John wrote a Gospel, three Epistles, and one Revelation before he died an old man of natural causes. Both, and the rest of the Twelve, did follow The Master where He led.

40. The cup and the baptism are there for the taking, but the giving of particular thrones is not the prerogative of the Son, “οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸν δοῦναι, ἀλλ’ οἷς ἡτοιμάσται – is not mine to give, but for whom it has been prepared.” One might expect that such a thing would be up to the Father, but He doesn't say that, but what else could it be?

The emphatic “but – ἀλλ’” starts that phrase, and the verb “prepared” is “ἡτοιμάσται” a perfect tense; action in the past with results continuing into the future. The assigning of which thrones to which people seems to have been already decided, and when one thinks of the best thrones, one would think about the likes of Moses, Abraham, and Elijah.

These days, we would also think of the likes of James and John, the rest of the Twelve, the other Apostles, and especially those who have suffered a martyr's death to get the top places in heaven. I should not expect my throne – if there is a throne for me – to be in a better place than James and John or other Christians who have done better than I.

But enough about my throne – or not – in heaven.

41. When the other ten heard the two making such a request, they “ἤρξαντο ἀγανακτεῖν – began to be angry” towards The Twins. The verb is in the present infinitive form. The translators try different words to capture the meaning of the word, with word “indignant” the leader in the clubhouse, and words like “displeased, furious,” and “irritated” trailing.

I don't like the word “indignant” because I don't know what it means, and I'm not alone. Mark used this word earlier in this chapter (14) to describe how Jesus felt when people tried to stop other people from bringing children to Jesus, and he will use it later (14:4) to describe how some people felt when a woman came and poured ointment on Jesus' feet.

It's the feeling you get when somebody does something, and you are relating that thing to a friend you use the sentence, “I can't believe she did that” or “I'm like, ‘did he really say that?’” Since I'm not a translator, I don't have to pick a word, and when I preach this text that's probably how I will describe the reaction of the ten to the audacity of the two.

42. Now Jesus calls them together and makes an axiomatic observation that pre-dates Machiavelli by several centuries, “Οἴδατε ὅτι οἱ δοκοῦντες ἄρχειν τῶν ἐθνῶν κατακυριεύουσιν αὐτῶν – You know that those given to rule over the Gentiles lord over them.” He's speaking here to the universal class system, the historical norm for humans.

Whatever time, place, and society you're talking about, you don't just get to be a part of the nobility. In any group of people, there will always be stronger and weaker, smarter and not so much, leaders and followers. The stronger and smarter become leaders, and draw followers to themselves, who the strong then proceed to rule over the weaker.

Or to put it another way, “καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι αὐτῶν κατεξουσιάζουσιν αὐτῶν – and the greater ones rule over them.” The adjective is a comparative (greater), not a superlative (greatest), and the verb “κατεξουσιάζω” means “to exercise authority over.” Those who have the power use that power to rule those over whom they have that power.

There’s a difference between “ruling” and “governing.” A smart man who recently died observed that you can tell when you’re being ruled, not governed, when you have to obey the rules, but they don’t. In this country, the historical anomaly, we are used to being governed by people we elect, an idea that has made some headway in Europe.

43. But the way these things work in the Kingdom of God is pretty much opposite from the way they work in the secular world; “οὐχ οὕτως δέ ἐστιν ἐν ὑμῖν – it will not be like that among you.” The last word is plural (you), and this applies to all areas and all levels of the Church, which is governed by the Word of God, not by force of power or arms.

Then the emphatic “ἀλλ’ ὃς ἂν θέλῃ μέγας γενέσθαι ἐν ὑμῖν, ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος – whoever wants – in you – to be great will be your servant.” The second person continues to be plural, and it’s also a comparative (greater), not the superlative (greatest.) Far from exercising power in the Church, if you want to be greater, then become a servant.

44. In case you didn’t get it, He continues, “ὃς ἂν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος, ἔσται πάντων δοῦλος – whoever wants – in you – to become first, will be a servant of all.” Several times the term “ἐν ὑμῖν,” translated by me “in you (pl)” occurs. Each of those times that phrase means something like “among you” or “within the group.”

The last word here, “δοῦλος,” is variously translated “servant” or “slave.” In our world, there is a large gulf between those the meanings of those two English nouns, but in the ancient world the word meant somebody who worked for somebody else. Some of those workers were owned by an owner, and some of them were paid by an employer.

45. Then He circles back to the cross, calling Himself a servant, and the Son of Man “οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι – did not come to be served, but to serve.” Διακούνσαι is the aorist active infinitive form of the verb διακονέω, literally “kicking up dust” (biblos.com), the word that is used to describe the active work done by a δοῦλος.

The aorist infinitive form of the puts the focus on the act of serving. That’s followed by another aorist infinitive; “δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν – to give His life as payment for many. The first noun is ψυχὴν, not just βίος. He gave not only His physical body on the cross; He gave His all, His very being given to the pangs of Hell.

This act would serve as a payment for many. The noun “λύτρον – payment” occurs only twice in the NT, both times (Mt 20:28) in the mouth of Jesus and saying the same thing. The word is often used in the literature of the day to refer to the cost of purchasing a slave, or the price paid by a slave for his own freedom, which used to be common things.

We don't think much in terms of buying and selling slaves. In the ante-bellum south, they did that all the time, and Charleston, SC was the place to go to buy and sell humans. But the Christians got rid of it – again – and you don't see much of that in this country, but just because we don't see it, doesn't mean it isn't around. It is, even in America.

The best estimates have the number of slaves in the world at 70 million, many more than ever were in the ante-bellum South. Most of those slaves are in places whose religion allows for them, even encourages it. Human trafficking is big business on the east and west coast and in Hawaii, and if you want to shop, there's an app for that.

Buying and selling slaves was a common thing, and He has told them that they should become slaves. Then He told them He is a slave, and He assures them that He also is doing the work of a slave. Now He is assuring them that He has bought their freedom, spiritually speaking. He owns us because He has bought us, and that's an odd idea to us.

Most of the translations use the word “ransom,” not payment. When we think of that word, we think of the Glenn Ford film by that same name or the Mel Gibson remake. Except here Jesus is buying the freedom of slaves, not paying off kidnappers. Nor does the meaning of “ἀντί πολλῶν – instead of many” properly come out in the translations.

Jesus noted last week that He died for the sins of all people, a teaching that we call Objective Justification. You may be familiar with the word “ἀντί” from such theological terms as “anti-Christ.” In English, the word means “against.” In Greek it means “instead of.” The Pope is not “against” Jesus, but he sets himself up “instead of” Jesus.

About the word “many,” which the Calvinists probably love, and looking at what the word “anti” actually means in the Greek language, what Jesus is saying here is that His one payment, made on the cross, stands in contrast to the many, in whose stead He has died, and who will therefore not have to each one (many) make a payment. He owns you.

Law/Gospel

No Cross/Cross – The cross is hard, but it is necessary. If not for the cross, then there would be no crown. With the cross, the crown awaits.

Baptized/Baptized – This is an interesting metaphor, as is the cup metaphor. The Law dictates that we must be baptized with the fire of suffering and drink the cup of hardship, but in Baptism... and in the Sacrament... I like that.

Slave/Free – We were in bondage to sin and death, but Jesus has “purchased and won me, a lost and condemned creature.”

Sermon Titles

Be Careful What You Ask For

You Want What?

Drinking the Cup

Hymns

Sing songs from the *Lent* section during the Lenten Season.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, IA

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Mark).
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark..* The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek
Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

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University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html