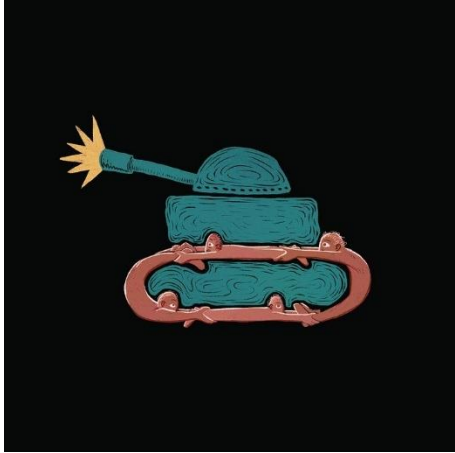


It Shall Not Be So Among You!

Sermon for the 5th Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: Mark 10:35-45



³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Him and said to Him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶ And He said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to Him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸ Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" ³⁹ And they said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared. ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² And Jesus

called them to Him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Some of you will go to job interviews in the next months or years at which, for example, the following question could come up: "How do you see yourself at our company in the next 5 years?" Quite a few people have floundered with this question because instead of placing the goals of the company at the forefront, the person places themselves first and says something like this: "In at least 5 years, I would like to be vice president of this company." Whoever answers like this will be considered pretentious and have unrealistic goals and definitely won't get a job in this company.

In our sermon text today, we also see an interview. Two disciples came to Jesus and wanted to know what kind of a future they would have in Jesus' company. Their question is very human. They want to obtain a special position. They want to be better than the others. They aim high and want to at least sit at Jesus' side in heaven. We all know these feelings and perhaps, behind this desire is something completely different. Perhaps, all we want is to be considered as valued and loved. Isn't that the desire of every single person? We all want to be accepted! We want to be valued! We want to be respected! We want to be loved! That's why I can understand these disciples very well. They just want to know directly from Jesus how valued and loved they are. "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." What would Jesus, the Son of God, say to this idea? "It's good that you set a high goal for yourselves, keep at it... Perhaps you'll actually make it happen!" Or, "Forget it, there's no chance! The place at my right hand and left hand are already taken." No, with Jesus it remains unclear: "You do not know what you are asking," Jesus answers. He has a very concerned look and His eyes glisten with a deep sadness because He then carries on and says: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" The sons of thunder seem to understand this language of Jesus well. For every reward, there is ultimately work. Nothing comes from

nothing. They know that kind of thing well. That's why the answer now comes like a shot out of a cannon: "We are able!" But now, Jesus must unfortunately truly disappoint them for only now must they understand that the way of following Jesus is quite different. These two sons of thunder had to learn that their desires were wrong. It could even be said that they are so misguided that they are exactly the opposite of what Jesus is. "If you want to be like me and want to sit right by my side, can you also do what I must do?" And Jesus explains further what this work means. He speaks about the cup that He must drink and about the baptism with which He is baptized. Both are symbols of His suffering and death. And Jesus' question is also this: "Can you also die for the sins of the whole world?" The disciples are overconfident and think they can do all of that. But Jesus doesn't give them a positive answer. He knows that the disciples have undertaken a lofty goal. He knows that they can't do this. He knew that they couldn't even make things right with their own sin. How then could they reconcile the sins of the whole world? And then the other disciples came into play. Now they also wanted to get involved. And they were really angry with the other two disciples, James and John. "There are clearly two here who secretly want a special advantage and didn't once speak to the rest of the disciples!" In this moment, an intense argument broke out among the disciples. It was all about human things. It was about jealousy! It was about insecurity. Who among us is the best! Who is the disciple that does everything perfectly? And who is the disciple who must be the very last with the worst grade? We know this discussion all too well. Where do you stand in your family, at work, or in school? Are you the black sheep of the family? Have you always been the ugliest and least accomplished? How do you feel when others can always do better than you? Such experiences wound and hurt. It's no wonder that we would do anything to no longer be last. It's no wonder that we would do anything to finally be accepted and seen as worthy. Jesus looks at all of this and now uses the situation to explain something fundamental about the Christian faith. He gives the disciples an extreme example. He compares the dictators of the time with the disciples' desire to be better than the others. Everyone knows that dictators are horrible, back then and still today. They don't want anything except for power and they don't shy away from cruelly killing all other opponents just so that they might have more power themselves. And then, Jesus speaks directly to His disciples: "But it shall not be so among you!" With this, Jesus completely exposed the desire of the disciples. What lay behind their desire to be the greatest and the best was nothing else but a desire to have more power. It's more important to understand the motivation that lays behind this desire. If a person has such a strong desire to be better than others or to be able to rule over others, there is actually a deep insecurity in the background. In the background is the realization that I have fallen into sin and am lost. In the background is the knowledge that I am lost and have no chance before God! In the background is the realization that I am worthless! "But it shall not be so among you," Jesus tells them. Jesus' disciples don't need to be better than each other because they know they are loved by God! They know that they are accepted by God! They know that they are already God's children and that's why no one and nothing can separate them from the love of God. That's why it is completely unnecessary and a wasted effort to make yourself better than others. Jesus presents Himself as a role model. Jesus is God's Son and He has the right like no other to rule over others. And yet He doesn't do that. He doesn't do that because His mission is completely different. He didn't come to rule over others but He came to give His life as a ransom for others. Jesus could look into the hearts of the disciples. He could see what their actual problem was. He could see that they were sold into sin, death, and the devil. They were firmly bound under these masters. These powers also rule over us and our lives. That's exactly why we are so selfish. That's exactly why we are so distrustful of others. That's exactly why we are not at peace with ourselves

nor with other people. And that's exactly why Jesus came. His life was to liberate the disciples and all of us from these powers. Jesus wants to redeem us from such things!

Now what does this all mean for my life's desire? I don't know what I will be in the next 5 or 10 years. I don't know what challenges you and I will face. But I know that Jesus called me to serve. That doesn't mean that I must always back down and make myself smaller than others. To be in Jesus' service is to belong to a very different power than is common in this world. That doesn't mean that I am better, greater, or more beautiful than others. But it means that I am redeemed. Therefore, I am free. I no longer belong to myself but to God. And I can pass it on to others. I may live freely and can pass on God's redemption to others. Amen.