

Sermon Lent 5 2018

March 18, 2018

Mark 10:32-45

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel lesson previously read.

If you saw the news this week, you perhaps saw that noted theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking died. Hawking was obviously a brilliant human being. He's well known for his work on such concepts as the Big Bang Theory, other aspects of cosmology, and things related to the nature of space and time. However, in the end Hawking sadly saw nothing past this life. He saw heaven as "*a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.*" For him, apparently amazement was to be found most of all in the observation of the vastness of our universe. And for fear? I suppose we see that he was afraid that mankind was working toward its own self-destruction.

This morning we hear of amazement and fear differently. **And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.** Those are interesting words aren't they? The disciples and others were walking to Jerusalem, and interestingly as we look in Mark they're walking toward Jerusalem for the last time as this in in Chapter 10 and the beginning of Chapter 11 is the Triumphal Entry, so there's an eye toward the death and resurrection, but they don't know this. So, why are they amazed? Why are they afraid? They could be amazed because Jesus has just been teaching. Often His teaching amazes people. As do His miracles. Certainly there was plenty about Jesus which should be considered amazing. But then there is the fear. Those who followed were afraid. Why the fear? What was there to be afraid of?

It's hard to say for sure. In fact, statements like this are why many modern commentators think Mark originally wrote to a church enduring persecution. What a wonderful way to comfort people being persecuted for the faith: "Look Christians, you aren't the only ones in fear, so were those who in the very presence of Jesus." In other words, sometimes the aspect of fear is a part of following the Lord. But why?

Look at this interchange, here. Jesus is walking along and the people are amazed and the followers are afraid, and what does Jesus say? **"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock**

**him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”**

Going up to Jerusalem is going to mean death for this man who amazes them. His teaching is utter wisdom, His healings are a blessed gift from heaven, and now rather than being given a Kingdom as He deserves, He’s going to be killed. And that is scary.

And then there’s this whole interchange that makes it even scarier. James and John come up to Jesus and ask for a special place in glory. Now it seems that this request is a bit in ill time, to say the least, as Jesus is talking about a horrible death, and they’re trying to make sure they jump in before it happens to get their spot in the whole thing. And how does Jesus respond? **“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?”** Of course James and John don’t seem to get it, as they are really quick to jump on board. They’re very quick to be willing to literally drink some kind of cup and be washed in a baptism. In fact, they might even have been thinking that Jesus maybe meant the baptism from John, which they had maybe undergone already—certainly they had been baptized. And to drink from a cup that had some kind of liquid in it, maybe even like the cup at the Passover. But what did Jesus actually mean by this? Again, it comes back to death. The fear would make sense. Jesus is talking about His own death, and He’s talking the death of His disciples. It’s scary.

And then there’s another kind of death He’s talking about. Of course this one is much more subtle, it’s not as outwardly violent, but it’s there. That’s the death to self. He’s said explicitly elsewhere, even if doesn’t say it here: “If anyone would come after me, let him take up His cross and follow me.” It’s obvious, isn’t it? Following Jesus doesn’t just mean walking around behind Him and learning all of His pithy sayings, and all of His advice on how to live. It means following Him into death. At the least the death of the self in the call to serve others. **“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** Do you want to live in Christ? Do you want to follow Him? Do you want to be great? Truly Great? Give up your desires for power. Give up your desires for notoriety. Give up your ego, and be a slave to others. If that isn’t death for us, death to the sinful nature, what is?

Think about this in our terms today. Do you always have to be striving after the promotion, or the higher paying job? Do you always have to making sure you’re getting your way? Do you always have to be making sure that you’re getting your wants?

Now, as I say that, does that mean that we should turn down promotions, or better paying jobs, or things like that? No, but I think we often have a fear of what will happen to us, or will happen to our children if we don't push toward constantly moving upward. We fear that if we don't make sure we get ours, then we won't get ours. We fear that if we don't make sure we ask Jesus to sit at the right and left, or even more temporally, if we don't ask for the right and left hand positions in our jobs, or in the world, or even in the church, then we won't get what we want. Even worse, we fear we won't get what we need.

But what do we see Jesus saying? **You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.** We think these positions are for our good. We think that being in authority is about making sure we get what's best for us. We think that it's all about our life, and then we fear our death.

But what's it about? Is that what we should be seeking? Should we be seeking our life? Only in Jesus. Only in light of the fact that this is all about serving something other than ourselves. It's about serving what is best for our neighbor. If it's at our job, serving what is best for our employer, subordinates, and clients. Or in the world what is best for the person next to us.

But what about my paycheck? What about my savings? What about the plate on my table? That's all really easy to say, but what about when it means something real for me? And as you reflect on that, you can see why there is fear in this death. It's scary, isn't it? It's scary to think that I have to trust that God will take care of me. It's scary to have to trust that the One who created the whole universe knows you and promises to see you and your needs. It's scary to have to think that maybe I'm better off leaving my fate in someone else's hands.

But look whose hands they're in. They're in the hands of the One who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for the many. The One who came not to be served, but to serve you and to give His life as a ransom for you. The One whose death is for you.

You see, you don't have to worry about this death because this death actually means your life. As your life is in the hands of Jesus, you see that He was handed over to that beating, to that scourging, to the spitting, flogging, and mocking to suffer for your sins. He was crucified for your death, so that in His resurrection you would truly

live. You would live not in the fear of what you might not have, but in the promise of what is yours not just now, but eternally. The eternal Kingdom given to you by the blood of this Son of Man. Aren't those the hands in which you can entrust your death? The One who knows death firsthand and has already suffered it for you?

And look at how trustworthy He is. He has not only done that, He has not only served you in that, but He still serves you in that greatest of need. He still serves you in the forgiveness of your sins. He still serves you as His baptized children. He still comes here in His Divine Service and serves you in the promise that those sins you came and confessed this morning have been spoken, declared forgiven, by me His lowly servant. He still comes here and serves you with the food of that forgiveness, still gives even His own body over to you, because that is what He does in that authority that He has, He does not lord it over you, doesn't serve you for His benefit, but yours. He loves you and gives to you again and again and again.

It's truly amazing, isn't it? It's truly amazing how this Jesus works. It's truly amazing what He has done. It's truly amazing what He is still doing. And with that we see where our amazement should be. Should it be in the cosmos, in the universe around us? Well there's certainly nothing wrong with being amazed at the beauty of this universe, but where does that amazement really belong? In the knowledge that this universe is the handiwork of our gracious and amazing God, that it is the handiwork of the very God who entered into that universe to redeem it, because He could not leave it to suffer. And what about that fear? Well, it doesn't belong to the idea that we will destroy ourselves. The Lord is certainly capable of sustaining or ending mankind according to His will. Instead, there is something right about that fear in following Jesus. Of course, the fear doesn't come in the form of fearing death. We see in Jesus that the death to ourselves, to our sins, mean true life in Him. We see that serving is given to us to do, not because God is mean, but because that is a reflection of exactly what He does for us. And so perhaps there is fear of Him. A fear that acknowledges just how low we are to be before Him. A fear that sees life eternal with Him, not as a tale for the weak, but the strength of the God who came in weakness to bring strength to the spiritually weak and dead.

Sadly, when we think of amazement and fear, the most brilliant minds are unable to understand this sometimes. But it really, in the end is the most brilliant thing there is: the God who created the universe and all things, and yet still sees you and loves you. Amen.