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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we may remember that in our gospel reading from last week, we heard Jesus tell his disciples that it was divinely necessary that the Son of Man must suffer and be rejected, and be killed, and on the third day rise from the dead.

Last week's gospel reading consists of what was Jesus' prediction about his suffering, death, and resurrection.

And then we come to today's gospel reading.

And what do we find?

But Jesus once again tells his disciples that the Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.

This then is the second prediction of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

And Jesus will go on to make still a third prediction about his suffering, death, and resurrection.

Yes, Mark's Gospel contains, not one, not two, but three predictions from Jesus regarding his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection.

Why three? No doubt to stress the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Why three? No doubt to emphasize also that Jesus is a prophet.

Jesus sees what will be.

My guess is that the repetitive predictions are like a recurring dream which is often interpreted to have import, to have significance.

The dreamer keeps seeing the same vision, so it must be a vision from God, who keeps sending the message.

Just so does a recurring prediction stresses the inner sight of the one making the repeated prediction.

That message too is coming from God. God keeps sending the message to the prophet, and the prophet keeps conveying the message.

PAUSE

But just as significant as the repetitive prediction might be—that Jesus is to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise again...

Just as significant as the prediction might be, so is the response from the disciples.

Last week when Jesus predicted his suffering, death, and resurrection, we may remember that Peter responded by rebuking Jesus.

Peter didn't want to hear, couldn't in fact believe, that Jesus would suffer and die.

Peter rebuked Jesus because if Jesus was the Messiah, then as Messiah Jesus was expected to rise up and defeat those who opposed the Jewish people, namely the Romans.

For we need to remember that at this time, the Romans were seen as an unwelcomed occupying force in the Holy Land.

And the Jewish people wanted nothing more than for the Romans to be out of their region.

Thus, the Jews expected the coming Messiah to lead an armed revolt against the Romans—a revolt that would lead to the ousting of the Romans and the ushering in of the Messiah as a Jewish king.

Thus, the Messiah was not supposed to die a gruesome death by the Roman means of execution, namely the cross.

So, this is why Peter rebukes Jesus.

Peter's response then to Jesus' claim as Messiah is one of revenge.

Peter wants revenge upon the Romans, and Jesus is the one to provide it.

But Jesus rebukes Peter, because Peter just doesn't get it.

The kingdom of God is not about getting revenge.

Jesus as Messiah is not about bringing retribution down upon the heads of the Roman.

Jesus as Messiah is not about bringing God's reprisals upon the enemies of God's people.

PAUSE

And then, and then we come to this second prediction surrounding Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

And in response to this second prediction, we discover that the disciples were arguing about who among them would be greatest.

They were arguing about who would be deemed the best.

Who would be the big cheese, the head honcho, the top dog, the grand poobah, numero uno.

They were arguing about who would reside at the pinnacle above all the others.

The disciples were worried about the pecking order in the kingdom of God.

And we see once again then that the disciples just don't get it.

The kingdom of God is not about pecking order.

The kingdom of God is not about one's status in relation to others.

The kingdom of God is not about where one falls on the food chain.

No, the kingdom of God Jesus says is about being last of all and servant of all.

PAUSE

Now, over the centuries there have been many-a-sermon about this text that has focused on the idea of power.

For to be the greatest is to be powerful, right?

To be the greatest is to be better, more powerful than others.

To be the greatest is to elevate one's self, so as to be able to look down on others.

Yes, any discussion of power almost immediately devolves into a hierarchy of those who have more power and those who have less power.

Yes, many-a-sermon about this text has focused on the idea of power, who has it and who doesn't.

To speak of who is the greatest is to speak of power.

But I think there is another way to spin this text, so as to see it address something else than power, or to address what might be seen as another side of power.

For in today's world, I would argue that even more prevalent than the lust for power, is the desire to be right.

The desire to be right.

PAUSE

When we consider the talking heads on television that discuss political views on issues, it is more often than not a discussion about who is right and who is wrong.

And when we consider the conversations that transpire among people not on the television, but just everyday people hashing it out about this or that, it is more often than not a debate about who is right and who is wrong.

Should the United States have removed its military from Afghanistan when it did and how it did?

Who is right and who is wrong?

Should we still be wearing masks when we are out in public?

Who is right and who is wrong?

In order to go to certain places, should we require persons to be vaccinated?

Who is right and who is wrong?

Should the government have allowed pandemic unemployment benefits to have lasted as long as they did?

Who is right and who is wrong?

The list of questions go on and on.

And the debate about many of these questions seems to be unending, with never a healthy solution.

And we as people argue and argue some more, oftentimes vociferously feeling that the loudest voice wins.

Or we argue and argue some more, making sure that we get the last word, believing that the other party has given up and we win.

But I am pretty sure that as a society we have forgotten what means in our society to win an argument.

To win an argument doesn't mean that we are the greatest.

To win an argument doesn't mean that we have put the other person in their place.

To win an argument doesn't mean that we are somehow more right than that other person, that we have a leg up on that person, because they are wrong.

Society unfortunately has all but come to define winning an argument as belittling another person by having ourselves come out on top.

But that definition of winning is terribly misplaced.

PAUSE

In our gospel reading, the disciples of Jesus were arguing with one another about who was the greatest.

In other words, they were arguing with one another about who among them was the more right before God.

And so, it makes us consider what the word "righteousness" means in relation to greatness.

To be righteous is to do the right thing, to say the right thing, to have the right attitude.

To be righteous though is not to be great in the way the world defines greatness.

No, to be righteous according to Jesus is to be last of all, servant of all.

To be righteous apparently means to refrain from being great as the world defines greatness.

Ironically then, by the disciples engaging in an argument about who is most righteous, who is the greatest, is to already lose the argument.

Greatness for Jesus, righteousness according to Jesus, to do the right thing in Jesus' mind, translated in Jesus dying on a cross.

Hardly what we would understand as an image of greatness, right. Jesus was crucified. Jesus was last of all. Jesus was servant of all.

Jesus turned away from the world's definition of greatness and died on the cross. And no one would boast of such greatness.

So what does it mean to be right? What does it mean to win an argument?

PAUSE

Several weeks back in a sermon, I talked about an incident in the apostle Paul's ministry that has speaks to our topic here.

Several weeks back I noted that Paul addressed the very conflicted congregation in Corinth.

He was addressing a congregation that was so conflicted that the members of that congregation were actually taking each other to court.

The members of this congregation had made being right the most important thing to them.

Being right had become, we could say, their idol, their god.

So much so that they were suing each other.

And in addressing this situation, Paul wrote to them saying, "To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you."

Why? Because even if one Christian member is declared right and the other wrong, the relationship between those two Christians is strained, perhaps beyond repair.

And what kind of Christian community does this create?

What kind of Christian community is left?

Paul was trying to tell these Christians in Corinth that even after the judgment of the court, you still have to live with one another in community.

But because one is right and another is wrong, and because one is now deemed greater and another is lesser, the community is inevitably strained. And that is not a good thing.

So Paul says to those Corinthians, “Why not rather be wrong?” “Why not rather be defrauded?”

In an argument, to win does not mean having one’s position affirmed, to win does not mean being right...

To win is to maintain one’s relationship with another.

So why not rather be wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

It is a radical notion from Paul. But Paul realized that even if we win an argument, we still lose, because the relationship is ultimately strained.

And this truth of Paul’s and of our Lord’s, this truth about what it means to be great, to be right, to win by being servant of all, and last of all, this truth applies not only to the church.

But it applies to our home and familial relationships, it applies to our work relationships, it applies to those relationships with our neighbors and our friends.

Being right is not the end all be all, as our society seems to suggest.

No, being in relationship is what is most paramount.

Thanks be to God. Amen.