

## **Week Two**

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*HUMILITY*

## Call to Worship

*Let us worship God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. We are new creations; the old has gone, the new has come! Let us worship God as Christ's ambassadors. Through us and through our worship may we announce the good news to all. Let us worship God in spirit and in truth. Praise God! We are reconciled, redeemed, renewed!*

[BASED ON JOHN 4:24; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21]

## Confession

We confess that even though we have been united with Christ, our thoughts and words are divisive. We have been comforted with His love, but have withheld our love from others. We have fellowship with the Spirit of God, yet we still seek our own way. Forsaking unity, we have acted out of selfish ambition. Exalting ourselves, we have sought to be praised. Neglecting our neighbor, we have looked to our own interests above all else. But You, oh Lord, have not withheld your love from us. You became nothing so that we might gain everything. Have mercy upon us, according to your great compassion through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

[BASED ON PHILIPPIANS 2]

## Contemplation

### GOSPEL READING

*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. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, 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."*

[MARK 10:32-34]

### DEVOTIONAL

From beginning to end, Jesus' life on earth was marked by humility. "Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

Jesus "emptied himself." This is not to say he became something less than God in his humanity, "for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). It is to say that he became human, laying down his glorious form to take up a body of flesh.

An incomparable condescension. The Son of God gave up his seat at the right hand of the Father for a place at the table with sinners and tax collectors. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). “Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Jesus “humbled himself.” The emphasis is on obedience to the will of the Father, which was the death of his Son on a cross. An unbearable thought. But it is in his obedience that we see his humility. The night before his crucifixion, Jesus “began to be greatly distressed and troubled. He said to his disciples, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.’ And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me’” (Mark 14:33-36). “The cup” is Old Testament imagery for the wrath of God against sin. Jesus, in the garden, acknowledges what is to come on the cross, where he will take upon himself God’s judgment against the sin of the world. Jesus’ agony in the garden was more than betrayal or death, both of which are tragic in themselves. It was about the infinitely perfect and eternally unbroken love between the Father and his beloved Son, and the prospect of the Father turning away. The mere taste of it was overwhelming sorrow.

The thought of drinking the cup in full was so dreadful that Jesus asked if there was any way to avoid it. He went to God like a little child who believes that Dad is able to get him out of whatever difficulty he’s in. Jesus asked, “Dad, you can do anything ... can you take this cup from me?” For Jesus’ whole life, whenever he turned to the Father in prayer, he found comfort and strength. All the light and love of heaven flooded his soul. This time he turns to the Father and “finds hell rather heaven opened up before him” (William Lane).

It was sorrow unto death. When you see that the mere taste of the cup was enough to throw the Son into this kind of pain, then you are ready in this season to consider what the full experience on the cross must have been like for him. You can begin to understand the depth of humility that says, “Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

### REFLECTION

1. *Have you given thanks for the humility of Jesus?*
2. *What are you holding on to that you need to let go of for the good of others?*
3. *Do you sense a need to submit to God in some area of your life?*

## Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer

death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

[BCP]

## Call to Worship

*“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.*

[ISAIAH 55:1-3, 6-9]

## Confession

Almighty God, who knows all and sees all: We confess our constant striving for righteousness, acceptance, and approval from sources that leave us empty. We ask your forgiveness, and we renew our hope in Christ alone, who offered Himself to appease your wrath and forgive our sins. We find all comfort in His wounds, and we have no need to seek or invent any other means to reconcile ourselves with God, than this one and only sacrifice which renders believers perfect forever.

[ADAPTED FROM THE BELGIC CONFESSION, ART. 21]

## Contemplation

### GOSPEL READING

*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.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” 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?” 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, 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.” And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 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. But it shall not be so among you. But 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.”*

[MARK 10:35-45]

**DEVOTIONAL**

Jesus is God, but he became a servant. He is the righteous judge, but gave himself up to the verdict of wicked men. This is the humility of our Lord: He had nothing to gain; yet he gave up all he had.

Everyone esteems the virtue of humility, but to step into the reality of our lives is to remember how contrary it is to our thinking. In so many ways we are accustomed to building ourselves up – proving our worth, impressing people, vying to be noticed and honored. Ironically, we even hope to be recognized for our humility. If you think giving up TV or coffee for Lent is hard, give up trying to get attention for a day. You will realize how pervasive our desire is to be lifted up.

In the Old Testament, exchanging clothing for sackcloth was the outward symbol of making oneself low. It was trading in an outward expression of one's position in society and putting on the lowest position. To be made low in our day, we must know what it means to say, "Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). Roy Hession offers these penetrating words: "First of all, our proud self must be broken. Our own self must give up its rights. Our self is hard. It does not want to obey God. It likes to show that it is right. It wants to go its own way. It wants to claim all its rights. It always seeks glory for itself. The self must bow to God's will. It must confess that it is wrong. It must give up its own way. It must obey the Lord Jesus. It must give up all its glory. Only in this way can the Lord Jesus have all and be all in our lives. We must die to self."

Repentance must begin with humility, because even our repentance can be motivated by pride. We may turn from our ways only to protect our image. We tell ourselves, "I'm a good Christian. I have stopped lying or being lazy because I don't want to be like the liars and slackers. I'm not like that." So we look to Christ, who did not give himself to the approval of men, but entrusted himself to the Father.

During Lent, we are trying to make room in our lives for God to shed some light. God will shed light into the dark corners, but that kind of light can only be received with humility. Hession puts it this way: "The man who knows, day by day, the meaning of brokenness is the man who humbly agrees to what God shows him about himself."

**REFLECTION**

1. *From whom do you want approval or attention? What are you pursuing or doing in order to lift yourself up?*
2. *Are you willing for every stone to be turned over in your soul?*

**Closing Prayer**

O God of grace ... You have imputed my sin to my substitute and you have imputed his righteousness to my soul, clothing me with a bridegroom's robe, decking me with jewels of holiness. But in my Christian walk I am still in rags; my best prayers are stained with sin; my penitential tears are so much impurity;

my confessions of wrong are so many aggravations of sin; my receiving the Spirit is tintured with selfishness. I need to repent of my repentance.

[VOV]

## Call to Worship

*Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock. For he has humbled the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city. He lays it low, lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust. The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy." The path of the righteous is level; you make level the way of the righteous. In the path of your judgments, O Lord, we wait for you; your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for you have indeed done for us all our works.*

[ISAIAH 26:4-9, 12]

## Confession

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ you love us, but we have not loved you. You have opened your heart to us, and in our pride we have spurned your care. You have given us all things, and we have squandered your gifts. We have grieved you and caused hurt to others, and we are not worthy to be called your children. Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we are ashamed and sorry for all we have done to displease you. Cleanse us from our sin and receive us again into your household, that we might nevermore stray from your love but always remain within the sound of your voice. Amen.

[WSB]

## Contemplation

### GOSPEL READING

*And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.*

[MARK 10:46-52]

### DEVOTIONAL

Pride is the great enemy of humility. Bob Thune observes: "The brashest expressions of pride are easy to spot: the athlete who boasts about her talent, the arrogant entrepreneur who flaunts his achievements, or the well-connected neighbor who name-drops in

every conversation. Most of us are smart enough to avoid appearing prideful in these obvious ways. But that’s just the problem. We can avoid looking prideful without actually killing our pride.”

To put pride to death, we must “trace this serpent in all its turnings and windings,” as the great Puritan John Owen wrote. We must get a fuller picture of what pride is and how it looks, and the Bible helps us with this.

On the one hand, the Bible tells us that pride often manifests itself as arrogance: the Apostle John refers to this as “the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). But on the other hand, the Bible affirms that pride can manifest itself as subtle self-centeredness, looking out for your own personal interests (Philippians 2:4).

In other words: the essence of pride is self-concern. Preoccupation with self. It may manifest itself as arrogance and boasting or as self-protection and fear of people—but it’s pride either way. If we want to cultivate humility, we must put pride to death. How? By looking to Jesus as both our model and our mediator.

Jesus is our model, because though he had every reason to be prideful (he was perfect), he chose instead the path of humility. Scripture commands us to follow his example: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:5-7).

One cannot be like Jesus without humility, but if we merely try harder to be like him, we will miss the gospel. The heart of the good news is that we can be more like Jesus only if, and because, we are united with him.

We are united with Christ by grace through faith in his life, death, and resurrection. Because we have rebelled against God, we deserve to be crushed by his divine wrath. Even in our willful rebellion, we ourselves cannot bear the full wrath of God, hence our need for a mediator, someone to stand in our place and plead our case before God. Jesus “humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8)—taking our shame and guilt upon himself, and enduring the wrath of God against sin, so that those who humbly come to him can be forgiven and reconciled to God. This is the Good News of Easter!

Do you want to be set free from self-concern to love and serve others in humility? Do you want to be set free from numbering your accomplishments, talent, or network? Look to Christ, who was humble in life and broken in death to set you free from self-concern.

#### REFLECTION

1. *What are the major areas of self-concern in your heart?*
2. *How does the example of Jesus inspire and challenge you? How does the reconciling work of Jesus liberate you?*

## Closing Prayer

Humble my heart before thee, and replenish it with thy choicest gifts. As water rests not on barren hill summits, but flows down to fertilize lowest vales, So make me the lowest of the lowly, that my spiritual riches may exceedingly abound. When I leave duties undone, may condemning thought strip me of pride, deepen in me devotion to thy service, and quicken me to more watchful care. When I am tempted to think highly of myself, grant me to see the wily power of my spiritual enemy; Help me to stand with wary eye on the watchtower of faith, and to cling with determined grasp to my humble Lord; If I fall let me hide myself in my Redeemer's righteousness, and when I escape, may I ascribe all deliverance to thy grace.

[VOV]

## Call to Worship

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.*

[LUKE 1:46-55]

## Confession

Righteous God, in Christ you became sin for us. You took what we are so that we might become what you are. But we confess that often we ignore our sin. We confess that we too often do not confess. We keep silent about the sin that clings to us. But our sins are too great a burden for us. Forgive us. In Christ take away our iniquity. You are our stronghold, our hiding place. May we confess our sins, that we might then rejoice and be glad in you and in the righteousness that flows over us as a mighty stream of grace. In Christ, Amen.

[WSB]

## Contemplation

### GOSPEL READING

*Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"*

[MARK 11:1-11]

### DEVOTIONAL

Pride is thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:4). However, humility is not thinking less of ourselves than we ought to think, but simply

thinking of ourselves less. What we have to offer is from God, and should be offered in faith as an act of worship, not for our gain but for the good of others (Romans 12:1-8).

All of us want to be part of a community where pride and ego are put to death and selflessness and service are brought to life. This is just the kind of community that the Bible calls us to: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Notice that the key to this kind of community is humility. In other words, our lack of concern for others and service to others is primarily because we lack humility. All forms of self-concern manifest themselves in a lack of love for others. We become consumers instead of servants. Such self-absorption can turn an entire community in on itself, concerned only about those within it and indifferent to the staggering needs of the world around it.

Our consumerism is rooted in a lack of faith. We are worried about what others think because we are not convinced that God delights in us (Psalm 149:4). We are anxious because we do not believe God will meet our needs (Matthew 6:32). We vie for attention because we do not think God rewards what is done in secret (Matthew 6:6). We compare ourselves to others because we forget that Jesus is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). A consumer is self-seeking because he is preoccupied with building his own kingdom in order to meet his own needs. During Lent, Jesus especially calls us to re-right our lives, to “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

The simple practice of self-denial in Lent teaches us that those who trust God to meet their needs are free to consider the needs of others. They discover this gospel paradox: As long as I’m looking to get my needs met, I will never get my needs met. But when I begin to meet the needs of others – when I begin to live for them instead of for myself – I find that God graciously takes care of my needs in the process. The grace of God turns us into servants. Instead of demanding that we be served, we joyfully lay down our rights and seek to serve God and others.

God’s grace toward us in Christ needs to get down deep into our hearts in order to change us. We need to acknowledge our resistance to grace, which manifests itself in our desire to establish our righteousness and meet our needs apart from God. Jesus came to serve—to heal, to feed, to make more wine, to wash feet, and to die. When we humbly receive the fullness and sufficiency of his love, then we will find ourselves increasingly joyful and selfless as we delight in serving others.

## REFLECTION

1. *How has God met your needs recently? Are you resistant to grace?*
2. *How do you need to experience the gospel more deeply in order to serve others more faithfully?*

## Closing Prayer

O thou God of all grace, make me more thankful, more humble; Inspire me with a deep sense of my unworthiness arising from the depravity of my nature, my omitted duties, my unimproved advantages, thy commands violated by me. With all my calls to gratitude and joy may I remember that I have reason for sorrow and humiliation; O give me repentance unto life; Cement my oneness with my blessed Lord, that faith may adhere to him more immovably, that love may entwine itself round him more tightly, that his Spirit may pervade every fibre of my being. Then send me out to make him known to my fellow-men.

[VOV]

## Call to Worship

*The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you! They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

[PSALM 145:8-13]

## Confession

Word of God Incarnate, you came to this world to accomplish salvation. By your grace you call us to repent, to be crucified with you, that we might be raised as new creations. But we confess that we often do not live as renewed people. We confess that often we “go with the flow” instead of stemming sin’s tide. Forgive us when we do not show evidence of renewal. Forgive us when we let the fruit of the Spirit be choked by the weeds of evil. You have made us your children, members of your kingdom. Help us to show evidence of that every day as we work to bring your justice, peace, gentleness, goodness, love, joy, and hope to all we meet. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.

[WSB]

## Contemplation

### GOSPEL READING

*And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it. And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came they went out of the city.*

[MARK 11:12-19]

## DEVOTIONAL

We are to think of ourselves with “sober judgment, according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Romans 12:4). In other words, the humble person knows who he is, and whose he is.

This is the secret to Jesus’ remarkable humility. Even as a child, Jesus was about his Father’s business. People always questioned his identity, but he was not thrown off by their doubt or criticism (Mark 8:27-30). When the crowds were flocking to Jesus, he withdrew to prayer. He did not need the approval of the masses because he was rooted in the words that came down from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). Without any hubris, Jesus could say, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Without self-concern, Jesus could say, “The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death” (Mark 10:33). Jesus lived and died for us.

In contrast to pride and fear, the humility we see in Jesus is marked by dependence and confidence. If we aspire to walk in this path, we will have to think with sober judgment. We will have to be clear-eyed about who we are and whose we are. Where do we get this kind of clarity?

The gospel tells us who we are: We are made in the image of God, created in his likeness for his glory. This truth speaks to both our dignity and our dependence. Before and after the fall, people need God in every aspect of life, “for in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

The gospel tells us whose we are: We belong to God, body and soul. He is our Maker, to whom we belong by virtue of design. He is our Father, whom we belong to by means of adoption. He is our Master, and we are his bondservants. He is our king, and we are his subjects. “Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

We believe this gospel, but we need help in our unbelief. We need others to remind us of the gospel, to speak the truth in love for our edification. We must be grounded in community if we are to be rooted in the gospel. In other words, the very people from whom we are trying to hide our true selves, God has ordained to help us see.

To use Dan Allender’s phrase, “You can’t see your own face.” That is, when God shines light on our lives, as we have been talking about, we become visible to others. We desperately need them to tell us what they see, good and bad. It’s not that other people’s opinions are absolute truth, but neither are our isolated opinions of ourselves. To be humble means we are willing to be seen as we are, by God and man. Our pride resists this kind of exposure, but it takes humility to become humble.

Roy Hession comments: “We cannot be in the light with God, and in the darkness with our brother ... We must be willing to know ourselves for what we really are, and we must be willing for our brother to know this as well. We will not hide ourselves from those

with whom we should be in fellowship. We will not cover our faults. We will speak the truth about ourselves with them. We will be ready to give up our spiritual privacy. We will not keep bad feelings in our hearts about another person.”

If we aspire to love one another, then we aspire to be humble enough to accept and speak to whatever the light reveals. In humility we are becoming less concerned with our prestige. Our wills are breaking and we are not demanding our rights anymore. On the journey to the cross, fear is losing its grip as we cling to our identity in Christ. Pride is being starved because we are letting go of our need to be right and our desires to be recognized. We are being liberated from the solitary confinement of self-concern.

### REFLECTION

1. *How does your community help you know who and whose you are?*
2. *Are you walking in darkness with those who are close to you?*
3. *What aspects of the gospel do you need to believe anew today?*

## Closing Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are enthroned in the majesty of heaven, yet you gave up that heavenly perfection to become a servant. We adore you for laying aside your glory and clothing yourself in complete humility as one of us. We praise you for the example of washing your disciples’ feet. Teach us to do as you have done. Deliver us from pride, jealousy, and ambition, and make us ready to serve one another in lowliness for your sake, O Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[WSB]

## Call to Worship

*The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. O you who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!*

[PSALM 95:1-5, 10-12]

## Confession

Almighty God, who is rich in mercy to all those who call upon you; hear us as we come to you humbly confessing our sins, and imploring your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken your holy laws by our deeds and by our words, and by the sinful affections of our heart. We confess before you our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness, and all our failures and shortcomings toward you and toward our family and friends. Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father, and through your great goodness grant that we may from now on serve and please you in newness of life; grant us this, we pray, through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

[BCP]

## Contemplation

### GOSPEL READING

*As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."*

[MARK 11:20-26]

### DEVOTIONAL

"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" (Mark 10:35).

How's that for humble prayer? "Before I say what I want, I want you to say you'll do it." We are good at telling God what we want, but we are not very good at learning what God

wants. That kind of learning takes patience, reflection, study, obedience, and all kinds of things that require deep humility. It's much easier just to go with what we think is best.

Jesus entertains the request: "What do you want me to do for you? And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (10:36-37).

It was an absurd request, but not to them of course. They had it in their heads that Jesus would deliver them from their oppressors and establish an earthly reign. Further, they saw themselves as high-ranking officials in the new regime.

Their perception of reality and their notion of what was good and right prevented them from understanding what Jesus had just told them: "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" (10:33-34).

If you come to God on your terms, expecting him to fit into your worldview and align with the way you think things ought to be, you are starting off on the wrong foot, and that will lead you down the wrong path. You'll end up saying things that are absurd.

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?" (10:38). In other words: "My glory is not what you think it is. And the path of glory is certainly not what you think it is." Like we often do, these brothers had mistaken importance for significance. Importance speaks to the value we derive from things like position, status, and the esteem of others. It is about building our brand: dropping names, getting close to popular people, flaunting knowledge, looking busy, defining spiritual maturity by activity and achievement, exalting public gifts above the others. Significance speaks to the value we add to people and culture. It's about building others up: remembering their name, drawing near to the fringe, teaching others, being accessible, defining spiritual maturity by love for others, exalting Jesus as the head of the body, and appreciating the contribution of each member.

"The cup" refers to the suffering that Jesus was about to endure. Before he could be exalted to his throne, he had to be hung on a tree. The disciples could not die the mediator's death, but they would drink from the cup of his suffering. Greatness in the kingdom always involves a cross.

It was a teaching moment for the disciples, and for us: "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" (10:45)

Humility is not the absence of position and power. It is the use of such things for the good of others. If we can get our minds and affections around the true greatness of Jesus and his cross – and what that means for us – then we can be great in the kingdom of God.

**REFLECTION**

1. *How is God's glory being made visible in your weakness and brokenness?*
2. *Do you want to be first so you can be seen as great, or to be last where true greatness often goes unnoticed?*
3. *You may feel like God isn't speaking to you about various things, but have you let go of what you want so that you might be able to listen with unbiased ears?*

**Closing Prayer**

Humble my heart before thee, and replenish it with thy choicest gifts. As water rests not on barren hill summits, but flows down to fertilize lowest vales, So make me the lowest of the lowly, that my spiritual riches may exceedingly abound. When I leave duties undone, may condemning thought strip me of pride, deepen in me devotion to thy service, and quicken me to more watchful care. When I am tempted to think highly of myself, grant me to see the wily power of my spiritual enemy; Help me to stand with wary eye on the watch-tower of faith, and to cling with determined grasp to my humble Lord; If I fall let me hide myself in my Redeemer's righteousness, and when I escape, may I ascribe all deliverance to thy grace. Keep me humble, meek, lowly.

[VOV]

## Third Sunday of Lent

By his resurrection he has overcome death so that he might make us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death. By his power we too are already now resurrected to a new life. Christ's resurrection is a guarantee of our glorious resurrection.

[HEIDELBERG Q.45]

Jesus Christ is the hope of God's world. In his death, the justice of God is established; forgiveness of sin is proclaimed. On the day of his resurrection, the tomb was empty; his disciples saw him; death was defeated; new life had come. God's purpose for the world was sealed.

[OUR SONG OF HOPE, ST. 4]



Man of Sorrows! what a name  
For the Son of God, Who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood;  
Sealed my pardon with His blood.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
Full atonement can it be?  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;  
"It is finished!" was His cry;  
Now in heaven exalted high.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,  
All His ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew His song we'll sing:  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

[PHILIP BLISS]