

Our King Comes to Serve

‡ In priceless ransom from death (vv.17-19)

‡ In patient power for our service (vv.20-28)

In the name of Jesus, the Suffering Servant of God, dear fellow redeemed:

Apparently, it's not just the "Hockey Dads" who want to live out their fantasies of greatness through their children. And obviously, that parental tendency is nothing new. On this Palm Sunday dedicated to Jesus' humble, yet triumphant entry into Jerusalem, it's good for us to look back at the third time He told His disciples He was going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Instead of sympathy our Lord encounters selfish ambition by two key disciples and their mom. Yet the Lord's Apostle Paul counsels in today's Second Lesson: *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..."* (Philippians 2:5 KJV). **Our King Comes to Serve.** So should we. And so we shall as we look to Him...

‡ In priceless ransom from death (vv.17-19)

Do you ever "feel like a broken record... like a broken record... like a broken record...?" For those too young to remember, before MP3's, CD's and cassettes we had LP's – long playing records that scratched. The needle would skip and repeat the words... repeat the words... and repeat the words...over and over. It got so annoying that you wanted to use the LP for a Frisbee.

But nothing is worse than having to repeat yourself about something really important. Jesus, the Master Teacher, waited until almost the end of His three-year ministry to begin telling His disciples about His suffering and death. It's a good thing He did. They should have anticipated His Passion from Old Testament prophecies, but they had worldly plans. At Jesus' first announcement *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:22-26 NIV)

It wasn't much better the second time after His Transfiguration. *He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." And the disciples were filled with grief.* (Matthew 17:22f NIV) But their grief totally missed the part about His resurrection.

What really saddens me about all this is that while Jesus keeps repeating Himself, I realize I'm looking in the mirror. How many times have I heard His parables about humble service and heartfelt forgiveness, but failed to see the meaning to love God and serve my neighbor? Jesus gets very specific in this third announcement about the gruesome details: *"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"* (Matthew 20:18f NIV) Good News again, but lost on hard hearts and deaf ears.

In the mirror of God's law it's painfully clear how easily we disconnect Christ's innocent suffering and death from the service we owe Him and each other. Men will be fearful and lazy just as the disciples ran while the women wept at the cross. Yet church women get upset about a few pennies in their treasury while service to Christ and the saints is lost in discontent. False humility sets in when one figures, "I can't serve enough, so I won't serve at all." Sometimes individuals complain no one listens to anyone else, but they don't see their own attitude of "my way or the highway."

Watch the Lord of all creation ride an unbroken donkey's colt into Jerusalem. See His deep humility as He rides on in majesty to die. See your sins of selfishness and envy heaped on Him to wash away with His holy, precious blood, with His innocent suffering and death. Dear fellow disciples of our Lord, we feel the famous words of Isaac Watts: *"When I survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of glory died, My richest gain I count but loss And pour contempt on all my pride."* (CW 125:1) **Our King Comes to Serve – In priceless ransom from death.** And in His deep humility we find His grace...

✠ **In patient power for our service (vv.20-28)**

After such a gut wrenching announcement, how would you feel about this? *Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."* (Matthew 20:20f NIV) Wouldn't that put you over the edge? I marvel at Jesus, so steadfast in His love, so patient in His teaching, that instead of getting upset about our total lack of understanding, He uses this opportunity to bless us **In patient power for our service.**

Even though James and John didn't know what *"cup"* of suffering Jesus meant, they were more right than they realized. *Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."* (Matthew 20:23 NIV) Suffering – yes, but thrones for your glory – no.

Like the rest of the disciples, we too would have been upset – but for all the wrong reasons. The other disciples weren't concerned that everybody forgot about Jesus' suffering and death. They were *"indignant"* because they wanted those places of honor for themselves. Jesus, the King, would soon ride on to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of shame and death for the Messiah. But first He teaches His disciples a lesson about greatness in God's kingdom: *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Matthew 20:25-28 NIV)

Truly we have a beautiful Savior, the King of creation. And truly He is beautiful as He shines through His people. The quiet, humble service which Jesus inspires in so many men and women, brothers and sisters in Christ, serving shoulder-to-shoulder over all these years has been a special joy of my ministry. A few weeks ago I turned around and there were barrels of food and supplies being carried out for the food shelf, not just by the moms and dads, but by their children too. The joy of Jesus was beaming in their faces. Such humble service pleases our Savior too. It is the beauty of Christ in you.

Years ago we saw this when experienced members stepped aside for new members to serve. No one held onto their offices for personal pride. Now years later when we need committee directors again, old hands are stepping up to offer the best they have to our Lord. As one man said, "I may not be able to do as much as I would like, but I'll do the best I can." Likewise, New Life Women of Faith met the challenge of a meeting time by forming two groups – Day and Evening. Now Christ's life is shining beautifully in more than double the blessings. With the Lord's servant Paul we joyfully confess: *"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength!"* (Philippians 4:13).

God's love unites us in joyful service because **Our King Comes to Serve. In priceless ransom from death** we find pardon and peace. **In patient power for our service** we find personal satisfaction by His grace. Our Father in heaven is living His pleasure of blessing and service in you, His children. May He do so more and more as we hallow His name and see His kingdom come among us.

"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" Amen.