

Isaiah 53:4-12, Psalm 91:9-16, Hebrews 5:1-10, Mark 10:35-45

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

And he said to them, "What is it 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." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then 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."

--Mark 10:36-40

Methodists used to have in their hymnal, at least in the one before 1968, a hymn based on this Gospel text. I

think it may also be found in that generic non-Catholic hymnal known here as the 'Sunday School hymnal,' but I haven't checked.

It was an inspiring hymn, a rousing hymn, and hymn that made me feel, as a boy belting that hymn out in the youth choir, that I could take on any challenge, surmount any obstacle to serve my Lord. It is one of those hymns credited with fueling the enthusiasm that sent hundred and hundreds of the thousands of members of the Methodist Youth Fellowship off into the foreign missions, especially the South Asian and China missions, a one-way trip for many of those young men and women from the United States, Great Britain and many corners of the British Empire. The first words of the first line of that hymn read, "'Are Ye Able?' said the Master, to be crucified with me" and the refrain to each stanza reads, "Lord, we are able, our

spirits are Thine. Remold and make us, like Thee, divine.
Thy shining radiance, above us shall be . . .” I forget the
rest, but I didn’t have to look up any of what I just recited.
Does anyone here know the rest of the refrain? I thought
most of you might, somehow.

That is quite something that Our Lord asks the
Disciples James and John, those ‘sons of thunder’ who asked
to be Jesus’ right- and left-hand men in the new world that
would be His Kingdom, essentially, ‘Can you suffer as I
suffer? Can you suffer as I suffer for doing good, for
showing mercy, for forgiving in God’s name, for healing in
God’s name, for declaring a new world order based on
justice and peace in God’s name? Can you suffer insult?
Can you suffer intimidation? Can you suffer privation and
persecution and, finally, a cruel and unjust death? Can you
suffer all that? Because, if you can, that is how you may

lead, lead by serving, in the Kingdom of my Father. That is all I can promise you. The rest is up to the Father. All I can promise you is the Cross. Are you able to accept *that?*

They said they could. Well, of course they would, but of their *ability* to withstand what comes with following Christ in this world they knew not a thing until those moments in which it was required of them. Sacred Tradition remembers that they all did hand their lives over to Heaven, albeit in different ways, in ways devised by the cruelty of the human heart. Odd, isn't it, that that one of the first Disciples who never asked anything special of his Master, the one who blurted out his faith and his protective, big-brotherly love for Jesus, Simon Peter, would be named Prince of the Apostles and his faith the rock on which the Church was to be founded, that it would be

Peter, and only secondarily James and John, who would teach and preach and act as the representation of the Risen Christ in the Church newborn after Pentecost.

I am not exactly sure why "Are Ye Able" is not in either of our hymnals and not in any Lutheran hymnal of which I know. Perhaps we are to do more listening to the Word of God than asking for special privileges from Christ Crucified, Who set aside all of His privileges for us. Perhaps as well it has to do with our reluctance, that goes all the way back, 1,500 years back to Saint Augustine, and in a sense, to Saint Paul the Apostle, a reluctance to say that we *can* do anything but what we are really good at without trying, that is, *sinning*, behaving as though God were not God and we were, behaving as though our neighbor and the whole creation did not bear the image and the reflection of the living God, as though

all flesh had not been sanctified by the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. We are good at all of that sort of thing. Are we 'able' to do something? Yes, we are able to *that!*

But Christ's call, which is in and of itself grace, summons us, offers a strong hand to help us to something more, to something higher, to suffering for the sake of love, to follow where He calls *because* He calls.

And there the old Methodist missionary hymn should start to make sense to Lutheran ears. It is not some disinterested third party or parties—like God and Satan in the Book of Job—that is placing a wager on whether we will follow the way of the Cross. It is, instead, *Christ the Crucified and Risen* Who, by *His* Holy Spirit, so strongly *desires* us, *wants* us and *will have* us to go not where He simply sends us, but where *He has led the way*. That is how He is, in the words of Hebrews in today's Second Reading, our

great High Priest, that mediator in Whom all priesthood, all mediation between God and the world, is summed up, fulfilled and, in that sense, brought to a conclusion. He takes the abuse of the whole world, *freely*, and He frees us by His call and by His Spirit to pass through that penalty for love as well, love that is not always returned, love that may be misunderstood, love whose patience may be mistaken for weakness and foolishness, love that seems always to shatter on the wall of death, the death of the beloved and the death of the lover alike.

As Disciples of Christ in the community of the Church, we are sometimes called to tasks that may seem simple, tedious and routine but which, on closer examination, and on second or third thought may seem daunting. For some involved directly in our congregation's first-ever 'every member visitation,' for some of the visitors

and for some of those to be visited perhaps, anxiety may be high, even though all we are attempting is a simple home visit, member to member, to talk and pray together about our mission and our life together. This is not merely a rule made up by some distant church administration. This visitation, as an annual, normal happening in our congregation, is an opportunity to know one another better, to overcome many a misconception or worry that can evaporate in the instant of a smile or handshake, and also to bear those burdens *with* others which they may try to bear in silent solitude where that kind of trust and sharing takes place in the brief time planned for each visit.

The Church is a people called collectively to this priesthood of suffering love in the One Priest between God and the world, the Crucified and Risen Christ. As I almost always conclude each sermon with that doxology

from the Book of Revelation, "He has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father," that is the common calling and dignity of each of the Baptized, both those who have just begun their journey, as little Aidan Gregory Glenn Shaull did just last Sunday, as well as those who have lived a long life as soldiers of the Cross. And within that priestly fellowship some are called to Apostolic ministry, deacons and elders/priests and bishops called to act and to preach and to teach as Christ among the first Disciples, as Peter and Paul among the members of the newborn Church. But their calling, my own calling too, is a call to the Cross in which nothing but the Cross in this life should be expected.

It would be not the folly of faith, not a daring leap and venture of faith but rather *stupidity* to walk such a path without *joy*. James and John heard Jesus' words about

the Cross, about the chalice of suffering for the sake of the Kingdom, but what they saw, and the reason they gave their bold, almost proto-Methodist 'yes' to His call and promise was *Him*, God-among-us, Immanuel. They saw in Him the Friend Who had chosen them, out of the most ordinary of men, out of—in Heaven's name!—the *fishing* business to spread a net of God's merciful love that would encompass the whole world, as it is still doing to this day. When you hear His call to love and kindness and mercy that may and probably will cost you something, try not to puzzle too much about the question itself. Keep your eyes and ears, your mind and heart open instead to the One Who asks this of you.

Let us pray now together in the words of the second concluding prayer of the Office of Evening Prayer as

you find this printed in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*,
page 153:

LORD God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ Our Lord.
✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S.D.G.!