**Mark 10:32-45 March 21, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 10 here re-reading these words. “You know that those who are considered rules 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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Martin Luther wrote in his tract *On the Freedom of the Christian*, “A Christian is an utterly free man, lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is an utterly dutiful man, servant of all, subject to all.” This illustrates one of the most complex aspects of our Christian identity. It is paradoxical in nature, but this week’s Gospel lesson illustrates it very well. And if you think it’s something that we would only touch on for this one week and leave behind I have some news for you, this relationship of free, yet servant, is quoted as the most important and guiding verse of our congregation. Last week we talked about the most famous verse in the whole Bible: John 3:16. We talked about how it is the Gospel in a nutshell and recognized by even individuals who didn’t know anything else about God. It was the “mainstream” verse of Christianity. Well, for us here at Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama, our main verse that we put forward to explain who we are and what we do, isn’t John 3:16, it’s Mark 10:45, and it’s printed right on the back of your bulletin. The mission of our church is to serve, and we get the definition of service in this verse, Mark 10:45. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

We are called to be imitators of Jesus Christ and therefore just as Christ is the almighty Son of God, he came not to be served, but to serve. He is free and under no obligation to serve us, he doesn’t owe it to us, he doesn’t have to do it. We can’t make him, we have no authority to lord over him and force him to do anything. He is utterly free from serving, and yet, he comes to serve. To be a servant not just to those whom he traveled with, his disciples, but as we see throughout his ministry as they go into towns and areas where they bring everyone to him who is need of healing or help, he is servant to all. He cares for all, he helps all, Jew and Gentile, Male and Female, Centurion’s daughters and tax collector’s, prostitutes, and even thieves who are hanging on a cross to die. That’s the God that we praise, a God of love and service. We therefore are free, on account of Jesus Christ, he makes us free from the obligation of sin, from the payment of sin and the punishment of our sin. We don’t have to worry about paying back the price of our sin through some kind of penance and punishment, through the paying of our money for an indulgence, by seeing and touching holy relics, all of that is meaningless, our own works for satisfaction of sins are pointless and couldn’t possibly pay back the unpayable debt that we’ve accumulated. Jesus does it all for you, just as he lays it all out for his disciples here in the Gospel of Mark as they are on the road to Jerusalem. “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.”

That’s where our salvation was won, on the cross, in His Passion, through his death and resurrection. You are free. And Jesus explains this plainly to his disciples, and James and John respond by saying, “Hey Jesus, before you go off and die and stuff, do whatever we ask of you.” It’s a headscratcher moment in the sense that Jesus is the one who is going to be doing the suffering, the dying, and the rising from the dead, you’d think they would want to do something for him, to learn from his example of selfless sacrifice, but instead they want Jesus to elevate them higher in glory than anyone else. And as you can imagine in verse 41 of Mark 10, we hear that the other disciples hear this and are indignant at James and John, not because of the horrible timing of this request or that it doesn’t matter who is elevated to a higher place of glory, but that they think it should be them. They have heard a very plain explanation of how their salvation will be won and what Jesus will suffer on their behalf, and all they can think about is themselves. Is Jesus traveling with a bunch of petulant children who argue over meaningless things? In this moment it would seem so, but it also is a teaching moment for ourselves and how we see the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, even in this penitential season.

You are free, subject to none. Jesus died for you and set you free from sin. We like to hear that part. Like the genie at the end of the animated Disney film, Aladdin, freedom elicits a joyous celebration, the shackles of sin have fallen off and we are free! What’s the first thing the genie wants to do once he’s free? He wants to travel! See the world, go places, experience things he hadn’t before, he wants to do things for himself! After all his entire life was doing things for his master, and now he can finally focus on what he wants. This is the natural inclination of freedom, once you’ve had to serve someone in the past, now that you are free, you would never want to serve someone again! Finally, you can do all the stuff you want to do without the threat of punishment or death from a master who says you can and can’t do different things. In our Christian freedom we find joy in self and an elevation of our own wants and desires at the expense of the example of the one who made this freedom possible. Because Christian freedom doesn’t mean we leave our neighbor behind. Again, make no mistake about it, you are free, the Christian is free, subject to none, but the Christian is also a servant, subject to all.

Look at the back of our bulletin, this isn’t something we have ignored, it’s our mission. It’s our focus. It’s the thing about our church that we want visitors to see and read and understand about the members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama. We aren’t hiding this we are putting it in front of all to see, and read, and understand! It’s the thing about our church that is different from other churches, it’s the highlight of what we do, we serve. We serve in the example of Jesus Christ who came to be servant of all by giving all for all. But we mess this up in many and various ways. We cling to our freedom and give excuses why we wouldn’t have to serve others. I’m not on a board, I don’t have the time, I don’t have to, I don’t want to, the list goes on and on. We instead look only at how we can best serve ourselves. We turn our service into lordship over others, claiming we do more than they do, claiming we are greater than they are because we have been here longer, and we have served longer, and we are the ones who should get the praise for all of the serving that we do. We deserve the prominent and important spots due to our service, just as the disciples argued over who was the greatest among them. We have failed so horribly at our mission. We are called to serve as Christ served, He came not to be served but to serve, and yet how often do we look only at our own interests here at Trinity? Are we called only to serve ourselves? Our members? Those we like? Those who are nice to us or are easy to serve? Those who have something to offer back to our church in the form of offerings and service? Or is our call greater? As Christ came for the whole world, aren’t we called to be servants of our neighbors that never come through these doors? To care for the needs of others even if they are across oceans and in far away lands? We are free, we don’t have to, but we are subject to them and their needs, even when they offer us nothing in return.

Because that’s the example of service. It’s our service to them, it’s serve thee, not serve me. We are here in God’s service to us, in the example of God’s giving to us, He give us His Word, His Sacraments, His peace and comfort, His very Spirit, we are temples of the Holy Spirit that guide us, we have his Holy Angles that protect us, that’s why we are subject to all because how could we not give when so much has been given? There is no greater than here in God’s church, because the greatest became the least to save us from our sins. There is no higher than and greater authority that is lorded over you, because even me, the one who stands in this pulpit and preaches to you, needs to hear the same words and receive the same absolution, and is guilty of the same things. As Paul reminds us in our Epistle lesson, “Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifices for his own sins, just as he does for those of the people.” I’m not here to tell you I am the greater one and you need to be more like me, that would be a horrible misuse of the office that you have called me here to serve. I am here to simply remind you of your mission, a mission you chose before you even called me to be your pastor. A mission of service. Service to all. Not out of obligation, not because you have to, but because out of thanksgiving to God for the freedom you experience as a Christian, you subject yourself to the needs of others so that they see the love of Jesus Christ through you. Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ, being equipped for life through God’s Word and Sacraments to go out and equip others in the same way, reaching out to them no matter where they are, valuing them and each other as important as yourself, and evangelizing or taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth of “John 3:16 and Mark 10:45” into this world so that all ages know they are saved by the work of Jesus Christ and they will not perish, and that they are called to be a servant of all. That’s our mission. That’s who we are. May God bless and keep us on that path and in that mission throughout the days we are called to serve him.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.