

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Jesus came with a purpose. We know that. He came to be the “*Savior, who is Christ the Lord*” (Luke 2:11), the angel proclaimed to the shepherds. John the Baptist identified Jesus as “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Jesus Himself told Nicodemus that “*God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). And just one chapter hence in Mark, Jesus, referring to Himself as the Son of Man, says that He “*came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).

In our Gospel for today, Jesus teaches His disciples more details about the humble service of the Son of Man. “*The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.*” Now the ESV does a pretty good job of translating the Greek verb παραδίδοται—“*is going to be delivered,*” they translate that verb. Often it is translated “betrayed”—“the Son of Man will be betrayed,” but “handed over” or “delivered over” is a good definition of the root word παραδίδωμι. Now Dr. Voelz, in his commentary, says about this verb that it is a “present stem with a future cast” (Voelz, Concordia Commentary: Mark 8:27-16:20, p. 676), and so “*is going to be delivered*” or “*is going to be handed over*” is a way to translate that verb.

But we had a winkel this past Tuesday, and Dr. James Bushur from Concordia Theological Seminary here, noted the present form and suggested putting more weight on the present, that this is Jesus’ whole purpose for coming, that all of His work here on earth in the flesh was a handing over. They still “will kill Him,” but His whole life here on earth was one big “handing over.”

I found this way of thinking intriguing. Of course, we know that shortly Judas will betray Jesus, that is, hand Him over “*into the hands of men,*” but this other way of thinking about Jesus being handed over means that it’s not Judas alone or even primarily who is the one handing Jesus over. Dr. Bushur, a teacher of Historical Theology and knowledgeable about the early church fathers, noted that they often taught that it was God the Father Himself who was the one handing Jesus over, that He might be killed and rise again, that Jesus might pay the ransom price for our sins.

Surely, that’s right. The Father is the one delivering Jesus over to sinful men to die. Jesus is the offspring of woman, who according to God’s first Gospel promise would have His heel bruised as He crushed the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15). God Himself supplied Abraham with the substitute ram to be slaughtered on the altar (Gen. 22:13). Jesus is the servant who “*has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.*” Jesus is He who was “*stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*” Jesus is

He who “*was pierced for our transgressions ... [and] crushed for our iniquities,*” by whose “*wounds we are healed*” (Isa. 53:4-5). And “*it was the will of the LORD to crush him; [the LORD] has put him to grief,*” Isaiah says (Isa. 53:10). Indeed, God had it all planned out even before the world was made, as St. John says of Jesus: He is “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev. 13:8).

This makes sense. As we’ve heard already today, Jesus Himself taught that God is the one handing over to cross and death, though perhaps we don’t think of it exactly in those terms. But remember John 3:16: “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son*”—the Father handed Him over. And to what does that little word “so” refer? It refers to the Divine necessity of “*the Son of Man [being] lifted up*” (John 3:14). Therefore, as Jesus is continuing the Father’s work here on earth, He does it by being “*delivered into the hands of men.*” He does it, doing not His own will, but the will of [the Father] who sent Him (John 6:38).

Now the disciples didn’t get it, at least, not all of it, and they wouldn’t until Jesus rose from the dead. And so, they remained silent in the face of this teaching. Perhaps, they didn’t want a rebuke like Peter received the first time Jesus foretold His passion, death, and resurrection. Then, Peter “*began to rebuke*” Jesus, but Jesus was having none of that. Jesus “*rebuked Peter [instead] and said [to him], ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man’*” (Mark 8:32-33). And Jesus did that before all the disciples, that they might know that Jesus’ cross and death and resurrection are “*the things of God,*” that this is God’s plan, God’s will, God’s way of our salvation. The Father hands Jesus over, and Jesus drinks this cup: “*not my will, but yours, be done*” (Luke 22:42).

You know the disciples didn’t get it because of how they reacted as they trekked through Galilee to Capernaum. And so, Jesus turned His attention especially to the disciples, after all, Jesus wasn’t going to be with them too much longer, and they needed to be ready to continue the work of the Father through the Son. They needed to become more like Jesus as He would send them out to be His mouth and hands and feet.

They weren’t ready yet, for along the way to Capernaum, Jesus’ disciples were disputing among themselves in a shameful way that simply ignored what Jesus had just been teaching. Their silence at Jesus’ query bears witness to their shame. Far from Jesus’ attitude, they had been arguing about “*who was the greatest.*”

Greatest how? It wasn’t about who was the greatest fisherman, or who was the best sailor, or who could mend a net the fastest—there is no shame in being the greatest, the best, or the fastest of these, just as there is no shame in seeking to be the greatest salesman at your firm, the best heart doctor in Fort Wayne, the fastest painter in the county. Surely, in that domain, there is no sin in wanting to be first. Surely, you were taught to study hard, to work hard, to do your best.

This text always makes me think of Garrison Keillor poking fun at Lutherans in “A Lutheran Guide to the Orchestra.” And though we overly modest Lutherans laugh at the instruments that supposedly no Lutheran would ever play, and at the two that are appropriate, this is not the domain Jesus is instructing us about. So, do your best work, and choose the best doctors, and, Lutheran musicians, grab your trumpets and oboes and flutes and violins.

No, the disciples were arguing over who would be greatest in another domain—in the kingdom of God—who would be the greatest in relationship to Jesus. In other words, they were thinking, over whom can I look down, over whom can I lord it?

Here, Jesus, who already knew what they were arguing over, said to them: *“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”* That is, in the domain of the kingdom of God, humility is foremost and servanthood, and this is what produces a bountiful *“harvest of righteousness ... in peace.”* Not earthly wisdom that is *“unspiritual”* and can be *“demonic,”* but the wisdom from above offered up in meekness. Not *“bitter jealousy and selfish ambition”* in relation to your brothers and sisters, but humility, considering yourself last and servant of all. This is the wisdom that serves, as St. James says, that is *“pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”*

Or consider St. Paul's encouragement to Christians: *“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”* (Phil. 2:3-4). How we treat each other, especially the lowliest child and the least of our fellow believers, bears witness to who we are and whom we have received. As Christians, God calls us to like-mindedness with Christ Jesus, and His mind was one of submission to God's will, and humility of being and deed. Here's St. Paul again, *“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. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”* (Phil. 2:5-8).

Dear fellow saints, Jesus has ascended to the Father's right hand. The apostles' have finished their work. But Jesus still has His disciples, an army of disciples, continuing the work He has given us to do—especially welcoming, loving, and serving the least of these. Lord, give us strength for this calling by the preaching of Christ's work for us, by Christ's example of humility, and by the reception of His body and blood for our forgiveness and life. And Lord, grant us a faith lived out in love, and finally welcome us to Yourself with all the saints.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.