

This Sunday's Texts:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 119

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

**Fix My Eyes
Pastor Jim Cords
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The holy gospel for this fifth Sunday in Lent comes to us from the Gospel of Mark, the tenth chapter:

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And Jesus 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."

The gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, work in our hearts and lives by your Holy Spirit. Guide our thinking. Give us the courage to humble ourselves before you and to see you in all of your fullness and to see who you have called us to be, through the Holy Spirit and faith in our Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

In our responsive reading of Psalm 119, we heard and said, "I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word." We hear in the psalm the power of fixing our eyes on God, of learning who he is and who we are through his word. I pray often for the ability to get out of the way, so that I can hear the truth of God in its purity, rather than through my own wants and needs. I pray the same for you today.

Jeremiah says in chapter 31, verse 33, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord; I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people." I will put my law within them. I will write it on their hearts. I'll admit when I first read this and the context that talks about no longer needing teachers and all that, I struggled with this idea, until I recognized that it's because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives, not at one point, but throughout our lives, that we are brought into a relationship with God, through Jesus, and that God begins to work on our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Listen to this from John 14:26, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." One of the things that the Holy Spirit does is reminds us of what Jesus says. This new covenant, God's work in us and through us, is to write God's word on our hearts and the Holy Spirit does that. We trust in God to lead us and guide us.

One of the frequent misunderstandings of this Jeremiah text is to think we no longer need to learn or be taught. We no longer need to grow in our understanding because we will just sort of instantly know all things about God, but the new covenant that is talked about in Jeremiah is this new covenant we have in Christ Jesus. It is the new covenant that is established in the forgiveness of our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus, rather than through any sacrifice or works that we might bring to the table. What is the purpose of this? Well, the purpose is that we might walk with God and as we heard in our gospel today, that we might love God and love our neighbor and so grow in our ability to serve and honor God in how we live as a *response* to the grace and forgiveness of Christ.

Many churches have as their mission statement to know Christ Jesus and make him known. That is indeed this journey of faith that we are on, to grow in our knowledge of God and to help others also to know him by proclaiming the gospel so that the Holy Spirit might transform their lives

and their hearts as well. At St. Timothy's, we have this statement that we are called "To know the Father; Grow as disciples of Jesus; and Go with the Spirit." We come to know the Father through the Holy Scriptures and we know who God is most clearly in and through God incarnate, that is, Jesus. We learn to be disciples of Jesus as we learn to do those things Jesus taught us to do by his example, as well as from his words and through his apostles, and the Holy Spirit at work within our hearts and lives, empowering us to live in the fullness that God intends for his children.

Listen again to these words in Psalm 119, verse 10 "With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your instructions!" And then hear a similar idea in Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you."

We learn through focus and study. We learn from teachers and from one another. Our lives from beginning to end, our growth and change, our growing in our understanding, this new covenant doesn't take that growth away. It simply establishes a new relationship upon which that growth happens. This new covenant is the relationship that God establishes with us and with all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We're invited into this new adoption, this new relationship rooted in who God is and what he has done for us, rather than in who we are and what we do for ourselves. The gospel of Jesus calls us to humble ourselves. We hear in Hebrews today "And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by God who said to him, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'"

The struggle that I often have as I want to grow as a disciple of Jesus, as I want to go with the Spirit in my life, is often confused by this thinking that I have to make myself better. I have to go and study more and learn more. I have to create opportunities for myself, so that I can become better, so that I can qualify for this calling of God in my life. I'm not suggesting we don't learn and study, that we don't get ourselves disciplined by people who are followers of Jesus, so that we can learn and grow by their example. But I am suggesting this. The humility comes from a recognition that all of this is rooted in what is done for us. The humility, the grace, the openness in our hearts and lives to be transformed by God comes in a recognition that God in Christ has done all that needs to be done on our behalf and, therefore, as that grace is established and as we stand in that grace, we also bow down before God in that grace. We seek and we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit at work in our

hearts, making God known to us through the scripture, so that we can grow in our knowledge of the Father, empowering us through examples and experiences and, yes, even suffering and struggle, so that we grow as disciples of Jesus. We are strengthened in our ability to follow him and to follow his example in our lives so that others might see him in and through us, to God's glory.

Jesus said, to the disciples James and John as they came to him, you know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them, that is, that they exercised authority over them. Then Jesus says clearly "it shall not be so among you." The example of Jesus for us is an example of humble service, sacrificial love. Jesus' words to his disciples then and to us as his disciples now are that greatness comes through service, that we learn the heart of God as we follow the example of God who served in Christ and loved us in Christ. Sacrifice.

That's the calling for all of Christ's followers. It's the calling for us, that we recognize that God's will for our lives is greater for us and for the world than our own will for our lives. So we have to humbly submit our will and when I say have to, I mean that this is the path of growing in the knowledge of the Father. This is the path of growing as disciples of Jesus. This is the path of going with the Spirit, that we seek the desires of God and we seek to grow in God's love for us, so that we might grow in our love for others and to understand. That is true greatness.

So we pray. Show me your ways Lord; teach me your paths. We learn through focus and study. We learn from teachers and from one another. We also learn by example and by following the example of others. This is how we learn from experience. We learn by doing, by being doers of the Word and not merely hearers. We learn and come to know God more fully and more powerfully as we seek to live in and according to what he lays on our hearts, through his word and through our Lord, Jesus. Acts 17 says this "that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being.'"

As Palm Sunday and Easter come in the coming weeks, we at St. Timothy's want to remain focused on knowing the father, growing in our discipleship with Jesus, and going with the Spirit. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and live into God's purpose for our church and for our lives, knowing that this, indeed, is God's will for us in Christ.

Through the cross, through the work of Christ on our behalf, we receive grace. We receive forgiveness. We become children of God and disciples of Jesus. Through the cross, we are invited to share in the glory of our great Redeemer. So let us sing together “The Old Rugged Cross.”