

# "Asking For It"

Text: Mark 10:35-45

As we walk in humble repentance through Lent, God grant that we recognize and acknowledge our sin, and thrill to the forgiveness that is ours by grace through faith in our Savior Jesus. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, "it" can be good or bad, can't... it? Even in the exact same sentence, depending on the context, "it" can be positive or negative. "You've got it!" is *good* news if you've been struggling with a difficult concept like a complex math problem or how to tie a complicated knot. That exact same "You've got it!" is *bad* news if there is a communicable disease going around. Or do you remember as a kid how you used to dread "it" when your parents told you that "You're gonna get it!"? That same sentence takes on a whole different meaning when they are talking about down-sizing, as in, "You know, mom, I've always loved that china cabinet." "Well that's good, because you're gonna get it."

This morning we will order our study around another question where "it" can be good or bad: "Are you asking for it?"

Our text is found recorded by God the Holy Spirit in the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Mark's Gospel:

**ESV Mark 10:35-45** *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." <sup>36</sup> And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" <sup>37</sup> And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." <sup>38</sup> 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?" <sup>39</sup> 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, <sup>40</sup> 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." <sup>41</sup> And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even*

*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

So far the inspired words of our Holy God. Trusting God's promise that he would meet with us and bless us through the study of his holy words, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

I'm pretty sure everyone here this morning would, by default, regard the "it" as a negative in a sentence like, "You're really asking for it!" I have a vague, fuzzy recollection of the first time that ominous prediction was directed at me. We had a bona fide bully at the grade school I attended. He wasn't necessarily the biggest or toughest kid in school, it was just that he didn't play by the same rules. Our parents, for example, taught us from little on that it wasn't acceptable Christian conduct to ball up your fist and to knock the living snus out of the other kids – just because you felt like it. Evidently this guy didn't get the memo.

One day I'd just had enough, and I decided to stand up to him. I also have a vague recollection of being buoyed by a movie I'd seen that clearly demonstrated that all you had to do to get a bully to back down was to stand up to him. I learned at least three things that day. First, that standing up to a bully when you are bound by the "you can't smack him" rule is a profoundly bad idea. Second, what you hear in movies absolutely cannot be trusted. Third, when a trusted friend says, "You're really asking for it!" it's probably a good idea to listen, because "it" there is definitely not a good thing.

James and John were "really asking for it" in our text for this morning, weren't they? Clearly they would have agreed, but just as clearly they would have had a much different idea as to just what "it" was in that context. What they *thought* "it" was and what they actually *got* were two very different things. What they thought they were asking was a place of special prominence at either side of Jesus when he "**came into his glory.**" What "it" actually turned out to be – what they actually gained by their request – was the wrath and indignation of the rest of the Apostles, a reprimand from their Savior, and either a most difficult life (John) or a premature, horrible death (James).

We're really not sure just what these "**sons of Zebedee**" envisioned when they spoke of Jesus' "**glory.**" The parallel account in Matthew tells us that it was actually their mother (most believe her name was

Salome) who was the prime mover in their request. Given the fact that up until Pentecost even the Apostles themselves were looking for an earthly kingdom, it is evident that what they were asking was for Jesus to honor them with positions of earthly power and prestige.

Note a couple of key points here. First, the request, though misguided, prideful, and self-serving, was actually a product of their faith. That did not make it right, but it probably explains why Jesus dealt so gently with them (when he dealt so harshly with the scribes and Pharisees who also craved personal power and honor.) James and John had no doubt that Jesus would succeed in establishing his "kingdom." The problem was their misunderstanding of what that kingdom would look like, and what "success" meant to Jesus.

We can learn from this that even "faithful" actions can be misguided. We actually have several examples in this account, first from their mother. While she obviously trusted both in Jesus and in the success of his mission, and though she was clearly just trying to arrange something good for her beloved boys, neither of those laudable traits justified what she did. Her actions were spoiled by ignorance, pride, and selfishness – *ignorance* in that she misjudged what Jesus' kingdom would look like, *pride* in that she wanted her family to be publicly elevated above all others, and *selfishness* in that the glory of her boys would also be *her* glory.

Treat this like a transparency that you lay over your own life. "*Wanting the best for our children*" is often a thinly-veiled pretext for making ourselves look better. Styling vice as virtue doesn't fool God – although we often use that sort of nonsense to fool ourselves.

Note also how the two Apostles began their request by asking Jesus to make a blind promise even before he heard the actually request: "**Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.**" Jesus wisely would have nothing to do with anything so reckless, so he replied simply: "**What do you want me to do for you?**"

Unlike Herod (who foolishly made a blind promise that ended up costing John the Baptist his head) Jesus was far too wise to fall into this trap. You and I also need to learn this lesson – in both big and little things. Parents often get caught up in this snare with their children, promising that which future circumstances (which they cannot possibly either know in advance or control) will prevent. For you young people, the same trap is often laid by your friends when they approach you with one of those, "*I'll tell you a secret if you promise not to tell anyone.*" No matter how

much you want to hear the secret, don't take the bait. Don't put yourself into the impossible position of making a blind promise, when keeping that promise might force you to sin.

Jesus, in our text, demanded first to hear the request. Note then how he gently tries to steer James, John, and their mother to a better understanding of just what they were asking. In their minds, James and John were probably envisioning themselves standing proudly by Jesus' side and basking in the glow of Jesus' earthly success. What James almost certainly didn't have in mind was the mortal terror of being marched before his executioner, or the flash of the sword as it bit into his flesh and ended his earthly life in a horrible, bloody, violent death. John almost certainly wasn't picturing the hardship and deprivation of his lonely, miserable exile on the Island of Patmos, or the heartache of living long enough to see the "wolves" as they gnawed on the tender young Christians of the fledgling New Testament Church. Failing to learn from Jesus' example (refusing to make a blind promise) James and John were more than willing to make a blind promise to Jesus. When Jesus asked them, "**Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?**" their naïve reply was: "**We are able.**" They could not possibly fathom the full import of Jesus' ominous prediction that followed: "**The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.**" The "cup" turned out to be the cup of sorrow, and the "baptism" was the immersion of great suffering – clearly nothing at all like what they and their loving mother had in mind.

James and John were "asking for it"; they just had no idea what "it" was. They soon found out. Our text goes on, "**And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.**" It's hard to imagine just what the two Apostles *thought* would happen when the others found out about what they had tried to get Jesus to promise, as eventually they obviously would. They apparently didn't have to wait long to find out what at least part of the "it" was for which they were really asking, since they were immediately bombarded with that bitterness and animosity of their fellow disciples. Jesus, however, turned this whole sordid affair into an object lesson for Christians of all ages: "**You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.** <sup>43</sup> **But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,** <sup>44</sup> **and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.**" He also goes on to use himself as the perfect example,

***"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

What a glaring difference from what they had been envisioning. Jesus didn't come to earth to rule; he came to serve and die. He did not come to be honored by men; he came to be rejected and killed by them. He did not come to sit on a throne; he came to bleed and die on a shameful cross. In fact from the very moment of his conception, Jesus came to earth "asking for it" – and *he* had no misconception whatsoever exactly what the "it" was. He came to take upon himself the sum total of God the Father's divine wrath for every sin that every human being had ever committed. That's the "it" he was asking for by leaving heaven and being born a human being.

How strange, how ironic and misguided, the request of James and John must have sounded in Jesus' ears. Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen, not only to him but to them. James and John had no idea what ***"the cup"*** they glibly wanted to drink from would taste like. Jesus knew. They hadn't a clue what ***"the baptism"*** referred to by Jesus would all involve. Jesus was well aware. They were asking for it, and they, Jesus knew, where absolutely going to get it.

Which brings us to a pivotal question: *Do you think James and John would have still made their request had they really known what the "it" was? Would their mother?* More to the point this morning, would you? By virtue of our Christian faith, you and I are asking for it, aren't we? We are asking to be treated just as Jesus said we would be treated – despised and persecuted by the world around us and harassed, tempted, and threatened endlessly by the devil and his minions. We are asking to be treated no better than the world treated Jesus. This morning Jesus addresses the question he first asked in our text to you and me: ***"Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"***

The answer you and I need to give? *"No we are not. Not of ourselves and not by ourselves. If left to our own strength and resolve, we will run at the first sign of trouble – as did Jesus' own disciples in Gethsemane. We will disown him, as did Peter in the High Priest's courtyard. On our own, we will most certainly fail and fall."*

Therefore know at this moment, and always, that the "it" that we are to ask of our God is the strength and courage that only he can give. The "it" for which we are asking is not the avoidance of all that is unpleasant or disagreeable, but the God-given resolve to bear up under all trials

and temptations and to simply and humbly carry out the work that he has called us to do. That is our life's purpose. That is our sacred obligation, and the same God who has called us to that humble service is certainly able to provide us with all of the gifts necessary to carry out his work and will.

One day, according to his schedule, God will call us from this great struggle and will deliver us to his eternal kingdom. There we will bask in the glory of *his* light, never our own. There we will serve him, never ourselves. But there too such service will forever be our heart's true joy and delight. God grant "it," for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

ESV **Jeremiah 31:31-34** "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But 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. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

ESV **Hebrews 5:1-10** For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup> He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. <sup>3</sup> Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. <sup>4</sup> And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. <sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; <sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." <sup>7</sup> ¶ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 18, 2018**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 18 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord We Come Before Thee Now"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Jeremiah 31:31-34) Our first reading is one of the clearest descriptions to be found in the Old Testament of the New Covenant that God promised to establish. Since man was incapable of fulfilling even the simplest requirement to save his own soul, God determined to do all that was necessary to save us. We are not saved by our own works but through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the New Covenant that God has established as our one and only salvation plan.

## Psalm 38 (Supplement page 39) (Brown Hymnal)

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Hebrews 5:1-10) Priests in Israel had to be born as a descendant of the family that God had established. In Israel that means they had to be a descendant of Aaron, the first High Priest. Yet God also established another family of priests – after the order of the mysterious Melchizedek. Our second reading explains how and why Jesus was a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek."

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn –35 (Red Hymnal)

"Song of Praise the Angels Sang"

## The Sermon – Mark 10:35-45 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Asking for It"

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn –723 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Wondrous Love Is This"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 798 (Stanza 1 & 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"God We Praise You"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (34) Ave (41) Wednesday (17)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-5:45 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Lenten Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer is considering the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI. Teacher Paul Tiefel has returned the call to St John's School of Okabena, MN.

**Holy Week Schedule** – Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week. A 7PM communion service is scheduled for Maundy Thursday (March 29) and a 7PM Good Friday service (March 30).

**Church Council Meeting Notes** – At their request, the membership of Paul and Jody Blumhardt has been transferred to Holy Cross of Phoenix. Offerings for February were \$913 above budgeted needs, reducing our YTD deficit to \$1,353. A Council position will need to be filled, pending the relocation of Treasurer McEnroe to Mapleton. Volunteers are needed to share mowing duties this summer. The Council is looking into a replacement mower. The next Council meeting is scheduled for April 8 and a Quarterly Voters' Meeting for April 22.

**Delegate Conference Representatives and Housing** – We are looking for one more delegate to represent St Paul at the WDCD in Bismarck May 29-31. We will also need housing for the pastors and delegates from other congregations. Please see the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table.

**New CLC Nominating Procedure** – The 2016 CLC Convention established a new nominating procedures for convention elections. Any voting member of a CLC congregation is invited to nominate a candidate for any elected office in the CLC. Elections will take place at this summer's convention. Please see Pastor Roehl for more information. The deadline is March 31.