

People like to celebrate what they've earned. It's a natural response. Getting that 4.0, getting into college, winning the big game, celebrating comes easy then. Think about hearing those coveted words from your boss... You've been promoted! Wow, there's a lot to celebrate. You're moving up the ladder. Time to get everybody together and throw a party. Friends and family surround you and shower you with compliments, how much you mean to the company, the progress that's been made, saying, "You deserve this!" Pretty easy for you to bask in the glow and take in the moment when something like that happens. It feels good to celebrate what you've earned. As we follow along with the gospel text we'll look at celebration from a different angle, to celebrate what you've been given. Where you're still the recipient, but you recognize that this reason for joy came from someone else, apart from anything you have personally acquired from your work. Without a doubt, we could come up with a long list of gifts that you've been given from God. The text from Mark chapter 10 highlights the gift of life, seen in a couple ways.

Let's step into the scene with Jesus and his disciples. There have been many conversations recorded for us leading up to our text, and Jesus is driving all of these conversations in a decidedly spiritual direction, revealing the differences between the earthly and the heavenly. For example, he says with mankind it's impossible to be saved, but it's not the case with God! All things are possible with God. Salvation is made certain with God. That was the key point. So Jesus ended up telling his disciples again, a third time, that he would be killed and then rise after three days. Salvation was very much on Jesus' mind. This makes sense since he was about to go and face the cross. What was on the disciples' minds?

Here, at the end of Mark chapter 10, we find James and John putting a request before Jesus, "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." Jesus listens, "What do you want me to do for you?" They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." Positions of power, this is what they were seeking with their request, something to latch onto while they were here on earth, imagining that Jesus would establish his kingdom there with them. This is what was consuming their thought process over the span of travelling from town to town. C'mon guys! Really? After Jesus has been pointing you to spiritual matters, now you're pressing him for positions of glory? Surely you're better than that. Quick, take a look at our own hearts. Are we looking for promotions in God's company here on earth? Is that too much of a stretch to say that thought has crossed our minds? Shouldn't Resurrection receive accolades for all of the wonderful work that takes place inside its walls? Most churches are suffering decline! We're still growing and we've even started a second site in Mount Horeb and joined together with a third!

In response to the search for promotion and high earthly standing Jesus replies, "You don't know what you are asking." There's another side to the promotion I mentioned earlier. When you're at the party and cheering right along with everyone who congratulates you you're not thinking about the responsibility that lies ahead at that time. You're hoping people wouldn't even think to bring up all the extra stress and the standard of excellence that is expected from you in your new position. It seems like the disciples had jumped the gun and completely failed to consider the difficult tasks that were ahead.

Jesus continues, "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" Which is to say, are you able to take on the suffering that's coming to me? They say they can.

Jesus affirms their confident reply, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

It was all a matter of grace! Whatever reward these followers of Jesus were going to receive would be gracious. You share that in common with the disciples! You have received grace in the faith that's been given to you. You are a Christian because God called you out of darkness and claimed you as his own. It's grace that you claim the classification of Christian. Do you know what all that entails? Being a Christian means you have what Christ himself has! You have God's favor and blessings. He calls you his child and gives you purpose in your walk on this earth, as you share in the mission to make disciples. You have perfection attributed to you because of Jesus' work, because of his obedience, death and triumphant rising.

We also have his sufferings. Romans 8:17 tells us, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Even here we see grace. Despite facing suffering while we walk this earth, all things, even suffering, are pointed towards the glory which God has and gives. Sudden sickness or stressful work days cause us to look towards heaven and lean on power greater than our own, knowing that deliverance comes from God. Jesus wanted his disciples to see the abundance of grace.

When the other disciples heard about the request of James and John they were indignant. How could they ask such a thing? Or had they simply been beaten to the punch, possibly having desired to ask Jesus for the same thing? Knowing what's best, and knowing what all of them had been struggling with lately, Jesus calls them together and tells them, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”

Jesus uses the earthly example of rulers as evidence of the corrupt condition of the human nature. Naturally, we would fall in line and misuse authority as an excuse to push around anyone under us. But by God giving us faith and by giving us the life of a Christian, the disciples and every follower of Jesus is called to be different just as Jesus said! No longer fitting in with the world's way of exercising authority, now striving to serve instead. God gave more encouragement through the writing of Paul to the Philippians, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Be thankful that you've been given the position of being a Christian, set up to serve and seek those in need. Consider our council members, who seek to serve and enhance the work of the church collectively, not trying to chase after personal gain.

What else have you been given? Go to the last verse where Jesus says, “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.” To give his life... Everything Jesus did was for you. Imagine that! His entire life here on earth was spent not being served, but serving. If anyone could come into the world and demand to be waited on, Jesus would be the one!

He's the very son of God! Yet he came to serve us. Paul, who wrote 1 Corinthians, echoes this lifestyle in the New Testament reading, remember how he made himself a servant, lower than others in their eyes, one who would act to advance the gospel and bring it to as many people as he could. The result of Paul's purposeful service was the blessings that come from the gospel, that both he and others would share in the many blessings that come with it.

Each step that Jesus took was a step in the direction of completing his mission to bring salvation. Throughout his life he followed the will and commands of God in our place. That's especially seen in this final verse. The word translated "to serve" means to function as the go-between, the intercessor. Jesus was constantly fulfilling that role. We can't reach perfection ourselves, so God gave us Jesus, who was perfect, to go in our place. We see throughout his ministry a mission-minded Jesus who preached the word of God, who taught people in the streets and in the worship spaces, who read from scrolls and read people's hearts and gave them the law and told them the good news. Jesus travelled to places others wouldn't dare to go. He talked to people who were rejected... infected... lost... when others wouldn't look in their direction.

All that Jesus did led up to him literally giving his life by laying it down on the cross. Find me a willing person who would take on the cross for the sake of their friends or family and I'll consider that quite an impressive feat. But if that doesn't turn out to be an activity that people are lining up for, let me show you your Savior who willingly took on the cross for his enemies. It wasn't just talk, it actually happened. The sacrifice which believers looked ahead to before the coming of Jesus is the same sacrifice we look at as we await his coming again to call us home. Every time we join together in worship we celebrate what we've been given; a life given up so that we would not taste the sting of death but see our Savior even in those moments - being taken to heaven ourselves and being assured of a Christian's place there with God.

There truly is a lot to celebrate today. I'm glad you're here to hear it! Your life as a Christian has many blessings because of Christ, and also many challenges that give you opportunity to hold tightly to Christ and his promises. I've now seen it firsthand, as a friend wrote out his confirmation verse, "Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you will honor me" in the middle of uncertainty, lying in a hospital bed. Overall, God has given many good gifts to our church, most notably the gift of his Son, the substitute, taking our sin in exchange for his sinlessness. That gift is one that will never change or be taken away. That gift is the heart and soul of this congregation and the substance of the message we humbly bring to our communities. We're not here to promote ourselves, but to promote the one who "gave his life as a ransom" and did away with our sin. It's not the grace and grandeur of Resurrection Lutheran Church. It is the grace and goodness of our God seen in the turning point of the resurrection of Jesus, the sure hope of every believer.