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INVOCAVIT

JOHN 15:9-17

During Lent we often think of "giving up something." We must be careful to avoid the giving-up-sweets type of thinking that looks on denial of physical appetite as virtue in itself. Also we must avoid thinking merely in terms of giving extra money to the church via "self-denial folders." This text calls on us to think about the true love that sacrifices self because it is set off and powered by the self-giving love of Jesus.

We Christians Who Draw Our Life from the Self-Sacrificing Love of Jesus for Us Must, in Turn, Sacrifice Ourselves in Love for Others

I. *We draw our spiritual life from the self-sacrificing love of Jesus for us*

A. We were made to love. This is implicit in text. 1 John 3:14 and 4:8 make it explicit. As God loved His creatures and delighted in them, man was to mirror His nature, especially in his love to his fellow man. This was to pour out spontaneously, as natural as living itself. Perfect trust made all concern for self unnecessary.

B. But we find that self-love cuts us off from God and one another. Each human being finds a different world confronting him. Every man is by nature for himself first. This leads us into worry, jealousy, hurts, quarrels, disappointments. It makes children insecure, marriages difficult and bitter, and earning a living a part of a tooth-and-claw war. Combined with death, it brings fear into all areas of life.

C. Jesus sacrificed Himself out of pure love for us (v. 13). How different His approach to people! He was not concerned to gain anything for Himself, to protect His

own interests. He didn't even ask us to deserve His love and its sacrifice. We find it hard to do things for selfish people. He found it possible to love us self-centered people completely, without hesitation or holding back. He was all for us. His heart went out to us. Just as the Father was all for us in sending and giving His Son, so the Son was in perfect harmony with His love. (V. 10)

D. Jesus laid down His life for us to deliver us from our self-love. Self-love is concerned about using things, people, situations, to gain security, honor, pleasure. By giving His life as a sacrifice for our sins Jesus brought us forgiveness. That means that we don't have to justify our past. His death is our assurance of God's love and care. That makes our present and future secure. We don't have to fight to make it so. His death brings us life forever. With our lives thus secured, we can be free from self-love to lay down our lives and know that we lay them down in safekeeping with Him.

E. As we cling to Him by faith, we have life (John 20:31). As we give up attempts to justify self and receive His work of love for us, we have life. Real life is not mere existence. Real life is standing before God with His approval. This we can now do. V. 16 can be translated "I have planted you," and it certainly harks back to vv. 1-8. As we are in Christ by faith, we have real life before God. It is eternal, and it begins now. This is the work of the Spirit, working out the power of Jesus' sacrifice in individual lives.

II. *We must lay down our lives for others by the power of His love in us*

A. To have life means to love Him (vv. 9, 10). This is the same as "to abide in His

love." To love the Lord Jesus means to receive His love. To receive His love is to receive life from Him. There is no other love like this, where it is not a matter of equal give and take but a matter of complete giving by Him and complete receiving by us. That is why it is a mistake to want to have a love of your own for Him that begins in ourselves, like our earthly loves. Many people think their love for Jesus is cold, because they want to love Him as an equal or partial equal. But receive all from Him, and you will love Him as you should. You will love Him, and Him who sent Him, with all your heart. Thus

B. To love Him means to keep His commandments (v. 10). What seems contradictory at first is here cleared up. If loving Him means receiving all from Him, then keeping His commandments is not a matter of duty. It is part of receiving. He gives us the commandment, along with the will and the power to carry it out. Our whole self is bent on doing it. It is our life. It is abiding in Him. It is, again, like the vine signaling the branch to grow by sending the stimulus, the power, and the material for growth.

C. His commandment is that we love one another (vv. 12, 17). He commands us to live (the new life)! As His act of self-giving out of love brings us life, we are now to live that life by loving as He does. This is a matter of basic attitude, a "philosophy of life." We are to look upon people (specific ones — family, friends, members of congregation, etc.) as He looks upon them. They are not potential competitors or dangerous rivals; they are people to love. They have needs and are therefore the targets for His life-giving love and for our love.

D. To love someone means to lay down one's life for Him (v. 13; 1 John 3:16). This does not necessarily mean literally to put one's neck on the block, though it does at some times and places. An even greater heroism called for: a day-by-day denial of

self-love, a denying of our own longings for security, honor, being well thought of, ease, etc. It means doing that in order to love other people. It means putting other people ahead of ourselves in all these things and being satisfied and happy in doing it. This is what a Christian does. It's his function, his meaning in life. It is enough for him. He thanks God that he can live in Jesus Christ by loving, in Him, family, friends, fellow members in the church.

E. This means living for others (vv. 13, 14). We don't dare to let love be only on the surface. We have to live for others, be alive for their sakes. It has to come from a heart full of, and satisfied with, the love of Jesus Christ. It doesn't necessarily mean doing everything they want you to do. It means doing what you know to be best for them, even if they dislike you for it. This would include, of course, letting them in on the secret of true life in Jesus Christ. This Lent try giving up yourself for others!

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REMINISCERE

JOHN 15:18-25

How courageous are you in the face of the world's enmity? Too many in the church today want to be liked by everyone. Social approval is the prize we seek. Disapproval is a chilling thought. Yet I remember a sainted professor at the seminary who told us: "If you are liked by everyone, you had better quit and start over. It is not possible to be a man of Christian convictions in a world of evil without incurring the hatred of some people." Our text offers help.

Christ Helps Us Face the World's Hatred

I. *He teaches us to recognize its cause*

A. The world hates us because we do not belong to it (v. 19). In character and behavior we are different from the world. This

brings upon believers the undying, malignant hatred of the world, sometimes open, sometimes disguised. Let's recognize it. The song of the Christian is not the song of the sparrows who fly in flocks and sing, "Cheep, cheep." It is rather the flight of eagles high in the blue, who have the courage to stand alone.

B. "For My name's sake" is another cause. It is the very nature of unbelievers to hate Christ, who is their Savior (v. 21; Rom. 8:7). Consequently they hate Christ's disciples because they bear Christ's name and bear up His name before the world (Acts 4:1-3). Since Christ, our Master, is hated, can we expect any better treatment? If we are the friends of God, we shall be the enemies of those who oppose Him.

You have no enemies, you say?
 Alas! my friend the boast is poor —
 He who has mingled in the fray
 Of duty that the brave endure
 Must have made foes! If you have none,
 Small is the work that you have done.
 You've never turned the wrong to right —
 You've been a coward in the fight.

C. Another cause is the world's ignorance. "Knew not Him that sent Me" (v. 21). Had they known God, they would without fail have recognized in Jesus Christ the Son of God and Savior (1 Cor. 2:8). Despite all of our education and college degrees the ignorance of our own age is appalling when judged by this standard. It scoffs at Christ and the Bible. Spiritually, today most people are "displaced persons." They do not know what they believe except that the preaching of the Cross is foolishness to them. (1 Cor. 1:18)

II. *He unmasks its folly*

A. The folly of the world's hatred toward Christ lies in just this: Unbelievers have every reason to love Him. He speaks to them words of life and salvation (v. 21). He performs mighty works among them (v. 24). His miracles and His mercies, His works of

wonder and grace, should motivate them to love Him. Above all, for them He suffered beyond compare, endured the tortures of the damned, died in their stead, so that with His stripes they might be healed (Is. 53). Despite their enmity He pleads with them. (Is. 1:18)

B. They have no reason whatsoever to hate Him. (V. 25)

C. The consequence of their hatred is fearful. "They have no cloak for their sin" (v. 22). It is the sin of sins that, having rejected the Father, unbelievers also reject the Son, and rejecting the Son, they reject the one and only sacrifice for their sins. At the Judgment they will stand speechless and condemned.

III. *He helps us display a courageous attitude toward it*

A. Surrender yourself more completely to Christ. He is your loving Master; you are His servant (v. 20). Every Christian life must have a *summum bonum*, an ultimate good, an unfailing Refuge and Strength. This magnetic north is Christ, of whom I can say, "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). He is the magnetic pole of my belief and the director of my actions.

B. Remember that the world's hatred shows you are not of the world (v. 19). God has chosen you out of the world unto eternal life. For you He suffered more hatred than you shall ever know. For you He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Heaven is your home. You are His!

C. Since this is true, rest assured that God will see you through (Is. 41:10, 11); give you courage in the evil day as in the case of Peter and John (Acts 5:20); send the Comforter (John 15:26); preserve you unto eternal life. (John 10:28)

This is the way God enables us to face the world's hatred. The hour in which we live is no time for timidity, retreat, or shadow-

boxing. John Wesley once said, "Always look a mob in the face." If God has placed His hand upon us, calling us to be His followers, the road will not be easy. It was not easy for the early Christian martyrs. Jesus did not say that discipleship was for spiritual "softies." But He has assured us that we are His children through His suffering, death, and resurrection. As such He will give us courage and see us through to victory.

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OCULI

MARK 10:35-45

The theme of these Bible words is:
Are You Able?

Yes, are you able to pay the high cost of enjoying a place of honor in Christ's kingdom?

I. *I'm sure you're perfectly willing*

A. There's no doubt about our will to be recognized and honored. Certainly we have missed the point of this passage if we fail or refuse to see ourselves in James and John.

B. Nor is there any doubt about our using Jesus to achieve this intention.

1. James and John prayed: "Christ, we want You to do anything we ask!" (v. 35). They were asking Christ to fit into their selfish scheme. The prayer was a demand on Christ to adjust Himself to their desires.

2. Don't we often do the same? How often doesn't the loud, strident "I" drown out the "Thou" in our prayers. And this is not praying in Christ's name or spirit.

II. *Are you willing and able to examine the motives for your prayers?*

A. What did Christ ask James and John: "What do you want Me to do for you?" (v. 36). More than a superfluous question. It enables, even compels, the petitioner to examine the motives for his request.

B. Also to us, Christ addresses this ques-

tion, to make us honestly search and explore our real motives in prayer. Are you willing and able to conduct that search, to face up to the facts no matter how unflattering and ugly they may be?

III. *Are you able to rise above the disciples' misconception here?*

A. They thought Jesus was talking about a worldly and material greatness and glory. Had just heard Him mention words about a resurrection. That sounded grand and glorious! They wanted a lion's share in that glory! Had overlooked those ugly words about mocking, spit, the scourge, and a cross (10:32-34). They thought pleasurable greatness lay in getting glory and being honored and served by men.

B. Is that our thinking too? Are we living in the prison of self? Are we little, isolated islands of self-centeredness, surrounded by shoreless oceans of self-love and pity? Does our life spin around our own aches, pains, and gratifications?

C. See how quickly Christ sets His disciples and us straight. He says: "You don't know what you're asking." (V. 38)

1. Indeed they didn't. They were requesting a place of honor in Christ's kingdom, never dreaming of the sacrificial price such honor demanded. They were not only asking for honor; they were also requesting their own suffering, self-sacrifice, and death. Indeed, they didn't know what they were asking.

2. Do we in our prayers? We pray, "Lord, bless me!" Are we aware that God's blessing may mean deepening, enriching life by toil, affliction, the following of Jesus by shouldering the cross? We pray, "Thy kingdom come!" Do we realize that we are here asking God to destroy within us that which we often love most — our sins?

D. Christ makes it painfully plain: Only slaves and servants are truly great and honored. (Vv. 42-45)

1. Once again Christ turns the world upside down. This is not the normal way (v. 42). These words are an indictment of every form of exploitation and imperialism, whether it be national or personal. There is nothing in the business of lording over others that merits the name "leadership" or "honor" or "greatness" at all. People and nations must rule for service and not advantage.

2. Things are the reverse in Christ's kingdom (vv. 43, 44). Honor, success, joy — all are measured by what you do for people and not by what you get from them.

3. Jesus doesn't just mouth these words on service. He lives them and dies them. (V. 45.) There's (a) your example, (b) your incentive.

IV. *Are you able to pay the price of such honor?*

A. It requires drinking a cup (v. 38). Cp. Mark 14:36; Is. 51:17; Jer. 49:12; Ps. 75:8, 9. Cup of intense agony!

B. It demands being baptized with Christ's baptism (v. 38). Cp. Luke 12:50; Rom. 6:4; Ps. 43:7; 59:2; 124:4, 5; 69:2 f.; Is. 43:2. Idea, apparently, of being immersed in suffering!

C. Be careful not to allegorize these hard words. Many of Christ's sayings have been "allegorized" into thin air and lost all concrete meaning. This is an easy way to escape costly sacrifices demanded by His words on severing sinful body members, or plucking out lustful eyes, or drinking cups of suffering and being baptized in affliction in order to be a faithful disciple. It's all allegory, of course! And with that we settle back to our comfortable Christianity completely devoid of cups, baptisms of blood, and crosses.

D. Consider two aspects of Christ's "cup" and baptism.

1. The high price of being sensitive to people and their needs. This is often tough! To expose our nerves to the hurts of others,

to load their burdens upon our shoulders already laden, to let our hearts be torn with anguish over suffering we can legally claim is not our business — that is not easy! Sensitiveness is a mark of development in the animal world. Neither amoeba nor clam has it. Clams don't get nervous breakdowns, for there is nothing to break down. Price we pay as men is that we, unlike amoeba and clam, have highly developed nervous systems. Even so in Christ's kingdom. People with highly developed nervous systems, the capacity to feel pain in the sufferings of others. No easy comfort or clamlike indifference. Can you drink that cup?

2. Being "baptized" with Christ's "baptism" will mean putting yourself into conflict with evil and dangerous powers. Christ didn't get His "baptism" of death for saying, "Consider the lilies . . . how they grow" (Matt. 6:28). It was for saying, "Consider the thieves in the temple, how they steal." Do you have the courage to be "baptized" — to be immersed in conflict, ridicule, persecution, and sacrifice even of your life, for the sake of the holy faith and conviction you hold and the Christ you claim to hold?

E. Of course, you aren't!

1. Or will you say with James and John, "We are able" (v. 39)? Able, indeed! At the first real crisis, at the first sip of the cup of suffering, "they all forsook Him and fled" (Mark 14:50). They just got their feet wet, weren't even halfway immersed with Christ's "baptism," and they failed the test. They weren't able at all.

2. Are you? Of course not — at least not as able as you should be! Only one way to be more able. Only one way to drink the "cup" and go through the "baptism," and that is by remembering that Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath against our sins for us. Jesus was "baptized," immersed in death — the Father's wrath — and a grave for us and our salvation. Believing that, thinking on

that, is God's power to enable you to say: "I am able; I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me!"

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LAETARE

JOHN 17:1-16

The Introit for Laetare Sunday bids us to rejoice. The Gradual speaks of peace "within thy walls." The Epistle concerns freedom. The Gospel speaks of the compassion of Jesus for the hungry multitude. All of it is so beautifully fitting and soul-comforting for this Sunday in Lent. And all of these things point to the burden of our text, our cause for rejoicing even in the very depth of Lent, namely:

Christ Prays for Us,

Therefore We Are in Good Hands

I. *Our Savior asks to be glorified because He has completed His task of saving us (vv. 1-5)*

A. "The hour is come" (v. 1). Now the time was at hand to carry out God's eternal plan of salvation, to complete it. "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (v. 4). He had demonstrated His "power over all flesh" (v. 2). Cp. His mighty miracles, especially His glorious victory over Satan there in the desert. (Matt. 4:10; cp. Matt. 16:23; John 12:31)

B. There remained the consummation of His work by His crucifixion, death, and burial. This looked anything but glorious. Here in His crucifixion and death seemingly is complete frustration. His was the death of a criminal, cursed of God (Gal. 3:13). Yet in death there was victory, the crushing of the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). And Jesus looks upon all that still lies ahead as already complete. There is no doubt in His mind as to the outcome. At the beginning of His ministry the Father had said: Matt. 3:17.

And now He prays that He might re-enter the glory which He had with the Father "before the world was." (V. 5)

C. This is your Savior and mine. He prays for you and for me. He has given us the knowledge of the true God (v. 3). He has saved us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He prays for us to be glorified in Him; therefore rejoice, we are in good hands.

II. *Our Savior revealed Himself to us in His Word (vv. 6-10)*

A. "I have manifested Thy name" (v. 6). He manifests the Father's name through the preaching of the Gospel. But not only is the Gospel preached at His command, but in the Gospel is the power to change the hearts of men so that they know the true God and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent, and accept Him as their Lord and Savior. (V. 8)

B. Now through faith we belong to Christ, for He has purchased and won us from all sins, etc. The reconstruction of the rebellious children of men into obedient children of God is the glorification of the Christ by the Father. The image of God is restored, and Christians, walking before God in righteousness and true holiness, glorify God in the Christ.

C. Surely, then, there can be no doubt that we are in good hands, for the Christ continues to pray for the effective preaching of His Gospel, prays that it might be effective especially in you and in me. Therefore rejoice!

III. *Our Savior Himself pleads for our preservation, protection, and steadfastness in a hateful, hostile world (vv. 11-16)*

A. V. 11. Note the contrast. We are still in this world, a hateful, hostile world. The world's mode of life, its philosophy, is diametrically opposed to everything of the Christ. And because the world cannot harm the Christ, it seeks to harm and to destroy

the believers in the Christ. The world is "the principalities, powers, spiritual wickedness in high places," against which we wrestle. Sometimes this enmity is subtle, sometimes open hostility revealed in bloody persecution. Indeed, an imposing array of foes to strike terror into the hearts of the stoutest. Yet we need not fear. Christ commends His own into the security underneath the Father's wings. He asks the Father to keep us from evil (v. 15). He prays that we might have joy even in the world (v. 13).

And His prayer is effective (v. 12). Aye, He promises: Matt. 16:18.

So, then, even under the Cross, in the very depth of the Passiontide, we have cause to rejoice. The Christ of Calvary takes us and our cause with Him to the Throne of Grace. He prays for us, hence we are in good hands. He commends us into the almighty protection of His Father. We are in good hands. Therefore rejoice.

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