

Human life is a messy thing. We'd like it to be, in fact there's a part of us that thinks it should be, a consistently happy experience. Nothing should ever go wrong, there should be no failure, all of our endeavors should be great successes, nothing bad should ever happen to us and no one should ever hurt us!

That's not the way it is though. Things do go wrong, we do sometimes fail rather than succeed, bad things do happen to us, people do hurt us, we are not always happy and it all seems just so terribly wrong! So we look for somebody to blame. Some will blame themselves, see themselves as worthless people, never doing anything right; some will blame other people, deliberately messing up what would otherwise be a perfectly happy life.

The idea we have, that things should be perfect in our lives, is correct, it's just not realistic. The intention God had, and still has, for creating us is for us to be happy! The deep-seated desire we all have in our hearts for things to be right, for everything to be true and good and beautiful, is a desire for God. We are created by love, for love! 'By Love,' because God is love; 'for love,' because God intends for us to live in an everlasting loving communion with Him and all the other people united to him! It's what we deeply desire.

It's just not what we get. Something happened: anti-love entered the world. In other words, sin happened . . . and keeps happening! Sin is anti-love and sin has entered the

world. It's easy to say "Well, don't blame me! That's all the fault of our first parents – they disobeyed God and we all have to pay the price!" That's not a very deep understanding of Scripture. We, too, have disobeyed God. Everything we do that is selfish, that is hurtful, that is harmful to ourselves or to others, directly or indirectly, whether we can see the harm being done or not, every time we choose to do something we know is wrong, or choose not to do something we know we should do, it continues the messing up of our world!

The messing up takes place even if we honestly don't know that something is wrong. Maybe we can't be held responsible for what we do, but the harm still gets done. A genuinely insane person who shoots up a shopping center because of all the wicked and evil space aliens they think are there can't be blamed for their actions, but the innocent victims are still dead. This world was meant for life and for love but our actions have made it into a place of failure and hurt. So, yes, it's right to long for things to be perfect, it is our longing for God, but it would be foolish to expect them to be that way in this broken world.

Consider James and John in this gospel passage. They want to sit at the right and the left of the King of the Universe when he comes to his glory! They want to be in on the party, the everlasting wedding banquet of Heaven! But Jesus says to them "You do not know what you are asking." The only way to get to the glory days is to drink the cup of which Jesus drinks, be baptized with the baptism with which He is baptized.

That means the cross. That means the failure, that means the hurt, that means suffering and the rejection of anti-love! But it's also the path to redemption. Jesus used the cross as a weapon to defeat death. Those who are united to him, who drink his cup, who share in his baptism, who share in his death . . . share also in his triumph over death!

Being Christian, being one of Jesus' people, does not mean everything is going to go our way. There is still failure, there is still unhappiness, there are still hurts and pains we have to suffer. And we have to know that! Otherwise we will waste a lot of time blaming ourselves or blaming one another, and, because we can't do anything about it, will want to turn to something we THINK will make us happy – like meanness and revenge, like isolation and rejection of others, like power and control, like wealth used selfishly, like lust, like alcohol, like drugs, like any number of things that only pretend to bring us happiness while they really just serve to add to the anti-love already in the world.

Jesus summons us, along with the ten who were “indignant at James and John,” for an attitude adjustment. We are not to look at life the way the world does. It's not about putting ourselves first, or being envious of others who put themselves first, it's not about controlling people, making sure they behave themselves. It's about being a servant, it's about helping other people get what they need, it's about giving of ourselves for the good of others. In short, it's about love, which is the only way to defeat anti-love. Then we are united with the Son of Man, the only one with the power to do that, but who “did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”