

Mark 9:33-37

33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

We are in the Gospel of Mark following the ministry of Jesus in chronological order from his baptism to the glorious resurrection. Last week we covered when Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees to prove to them his divine status by providing a sign. From there Jesus continues his mission of preaching, teaching, and healing. There are three very important things that go on in the gospels. One is the ministry of Jesus. He brings to us the word of God and he demonstrates the love of God by having compassion on others especially those that are sick and hurting and those that are neglected by mainstream society. Another important thing that goes on in the gospels is the reaction of the people to Jesus. There are those that are against him and actively plot to undermine his ministry. There is a very large crowd that follows Jesus because they want something from him or are intrigued by his power, fame, and awesome teaching abilities that is not anything like what they are used to hearing. Then there are the disciples, though they are far from perfect, they are devoted to him. However, the most important thing that is going on in the gospels is the mission of Jesus. He is on a journey to the cross to bring salvation to the world. As Jesus prepares to face the cross he tells his disciples about the torture and death that he will soon be facing. Every time he tells them about his death, the disciples miss the point of the theology of the cross. Jesus tells them why they miss the point. It is because they have their minds set on human things instead of divine things.

The disciples are devoted but far from perfect. They have failed to exorcise demons; they lack quality time in prayer; and they lack perception of the true nature of Jesus. Today's Scripture takes place after Jesus has told them a second time of his betrayal, arrest, torture, and death. They get to Capernaum and Jesus knows that they were arguing over greatness. At this time they should be grieving. They should be concerned about the news of his torture and death. They should be trying to grasp the theological concept of resurrection. At least they should be reflecting on why God would allow the Messiah to suffer and die. Their silence indicates that they are embarrassed because they know that their argument was inappropriate.

Today we see the human side of the discipleship. We often put our own wants above something that is much more important - surrendering to the will of God and putting God first in our lives. Most of the time we have our minds set on human things instead of divine things. Discipleship is much more than saying the right words in front of the congregation when you have a public confession of faith. To get right with God you have to give up your stuff. One of the major themes of the Bible is to let God rule over your life. We have the privilege of knowing the rest of the story, we know the ending, and we know who wins. However, the disciples were challenged in that they did not fully grasp what Jesus is all about. They were involved in the day to day mission of Jesus but they failed to grasp the main part of his mission. Jesus is on a mission to deliver word of God, fix what is broken in the existing religious system, have compassion on

the people. However, his primary mission is to offer salvation to the world and as such, the disciples fail to grasp that Jesus is going to be crucified.

After Jesus announces his death the disciples argue over their positions of prestige. This is like visiting your mother and she has called the family together to announce to everyone a terminal illness. Instead of weeping your siblings argue over who is going to get the house. Jesus teaches that greatness is the opposite of human desire and expectation. It is a reversal of status and a reorientation of priorities. God's kingdom has no place for superiority and no room for self glorification. It is a reversal of the values of society then and now.

Receiving a child is to receive the lowest in society and it is to receive Jesus. In their culture children were on the fringes of society with no rights and without respect. They were of a very low status with very little value, powerless, vulnerable, of the lowest rank just above a slave. Jesus teaches the disciples and us to receive those that are on the fringes of society children, women, the poor, the sick, and the alien, and to treat them all with respect. However, the humanistic desire of the disciples clashes with word of God. Jesus teaches only those who accept such powerlessness and vulnerability will receive him and God. When we welcome the least of these we welcome Jesus. If we reject them, then we reject Jesus, and if we reject Jesus then we reject God. So, if you want to be first you have to be willing to be last, willing to be a servant of all, and that means absolutely everyone.

Jesus is the most important person in all of the history of world. He became the servant that gave his life as a ransom for us. He teaches us to welcome those of the lowest social rank. When you serve in the soup kitchen, or homeless shelter, you are to treat those that you are serving with dignity and respect. How we treat others is a measure of our discipleship. Jesus was a servant of all and every one of us is to be a servant of all.