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The seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost 2021

**Mark 9: 30-37**

30They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” 32But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

33Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” 34But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” 36Then 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.”

**BACKGROUND**:

This Gospel is the shortest, and generally considered the oldest effort to set the Apostolic Tradition into a written form. Jesus is depicted as the Son of God whose ministry comprises a series of mighty deeds that are signs of God’s Kingdom breaking into the current moment in time and history. Mark’s story is vivid and concrete: Jesus is active (immediately/at once appear 40x) The crowd is often stunned, the disciples show both fear and amazement. The work can be divided into an opening introduction (1:1-13), Jesus ministry in Galilee (1:14-9:50) The move toward Jerusalem (ch 10) the last week (ch 11-15) and the Crucifixion (16: 1-8) Todays reading near the conclusion of Jesus ministry in Galilee shows the disciples failure to understand Jesus teachings, and especially his focus on. Costly discipleship. Rather than clarify their confusion with more teaching he places a child in their midst and draws misguided followers to the relationship of love that saves them and us all.

**VERSE BY VERSE:**

A significant challenge in hearing and proclaiming this passage is to allow ourselves to be moved beyond the all too familiar Sunday School interpretations toward a deeper and broader understanding that leads us out of our own confusion and arguments about the faith, into a living relationship with the one who is the source and end of our faith.

Vs 30 – **They went out from there** – Jesus, disciples, exit an unnamed house where they have taken refuge from an angry crowd after disciples failure to heal/exorcise demons. **Traveled** **through Galilee** – on way to Capernaum, home base for Jesus in Mark’s Gospel

**Did not want anyone to know about IT** – This is the Messianic secret here attached to the previous event of the Transfiguration……The events on the mountaintop, experienced first hand by Peter, James and John have not brough clarity to the teachings of Jesus or the disciples understanding of who he is/what his mission is all about.

Vs31 **He was teaching his disciples** – Didaskala, teaching, SAYING, indicating that this teaching is verbal, interpretative, relevatory. The words are plain to hear: But the teaching is incomplete until the actions of Jesus passion, proclaim the fullness of the Gospel.

**Son of Man** – anthropou – note word play / son of man/human hands

**Delivered up** – paradidomai – handed over (Is 53: 6,12)

**Human hands** – anthropon - while Jesus will be handed over into the hands of human authority, God’s greater act is delivering him up, for the salvation of the world. Human activities bear the fullness of divine redemption by God’s hand, not human effort, apparent from the divine passive tense used in several of these descriptions.

**They will kill him** – a clear and decisive outcome, predictable given the conflict Jesus engenders with both religious and political leaders of the day

**After three days he will rise from dead** – This will be God’s vindication of Jesus suffering, but it has no precedent in the experience of the disciples…Is it any wonder that they do not understand…..Even if they get the concept, and believe the teaching, the reality is beyond their understanding.

Vs 32 – **But they did not understand what he was saying** – Will they understand his doing in the passion any more clearly? This teaching is literally not over their heads, it is beyond their hearts.

**They were afraid to ask/question him** – not the fear of an angelic visitation but the fear of anxiety, uncertainty, they literally did not know WHAT to ask him. Their very questions would reveal their ignorance and lack of faith, why open their mouths and confirm it.

Vs 33 – **came to Capernaum** - Destination and home base, a safe place but in greater narrative a stopping off point on the way to Jerusalem.

**what argue about** - The question seeks not merely the content of the argument but the sentiments that constrain their hearing and understanding, the attitudes that divide them, allow/enable them to be divided are important to discern.

**On the way** – along the journey, on the road together (synod) Title early church, hence are disciples questions and arguments representative of the questions that hold us back today from a more engaging faith?

VS 34 - **They were silent** – They did not answer his question out of shame.

**For along the way** – as above

**They argued about who is greatest -** STATUS in Roman and Hellenistic society was everything. Where you stood in relationship to every other person defined your identity, your power, your freedom, your capacity for work, opportunity in social relationships etc. For a Christian disciple the only relationship of worth is that of our relationship with Jesus. The silence of the disciples cuts off this realization.

VS 35 **Jesus sits** – Assumes the posture of a teacher (he does not get up until 10:1)

**Calls disciples** – a literally new call to discipleship

**Be first become servant of all** – Doulos slave here inverts the matter of status as yielding privilege and place of honor to that of willingly taking on the lowliest of positions. If you seek the place of honor in the Kingdom you take the place of dishonor for the sake of others and what they may gain, not what you yourself might gain. This is not what the disciples must do to enter the kingdom, but rather what Jesus will do for them in his passion, in order to open for them the Kingdom of God. The teaching is shocking and unsettling and we do not hear any response from the disciples.

VS 36 **Takes a child** – Places a child in the midst of the disciples. Children here represent the lowest of status. Their place in family is tenuous. They do not produce but drain family resources. Both Greek & Roman societies set unwanted children out in the elements as means of controlling family size. Not seen as murder by them, but early Christians did consider this practice to be murder.

**Takes in his arms** – literally picks up the child with an embrace.

Vs 37 – **Welcome a child = welcome me** – This welcome is not mere hospitality, but taking the child into your household make them member family, adoption, incorporation

**Welcome me = welcome the Father who sent me** – to welcome Jesus is not merely to invite him in, but to share in his mission, The father’s sending is the heart of this passage. It is what will send Jesus and the others on their way to Jerusalem and the fulfillment of the promise in the cross and resurrection.

**AFRICAN CONNECTION:**

The Batombou of Benin upon the death of the family patriarch rather that placing the first born in his stead, select a child from among the family whose gifts and spirit wil;l best serve the family. Upon death the Father is honored for their service to the family rather than their status.

**THEOLOGY:**

To learn the ways of Jesus we must not merely hear the words of his teaching, but learn to walk as he walks in loving service toward all people, such is the way of the cross, our only way forward as those who bear the name and mark of Christ.