

Sunday September 20, 2009
Servant of All
Mark 9:30-37

³⁰They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³²But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

³³They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

³⁶He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Frank Laubach, who was a missionary to Africa, likes to tell the story of how he was shown a huge hydro electric dam there which provided power for a Firestone Plant.

Inside the plant was this massive pipe leading into four huge turbines. Below the turbines the pipe continued out to the foot of the dam. All was quiet inside the power house.

Laubach wondered why the turbines were not running and he was told that the pipe was closed at the outlet. Once the gigantic valve was opened at the outlet the water would flow through and the turbines would run.

Laubach commented about this later. He said "that is the way our lives are. The pipe must be open up toward God and open down toward others. Then the current can flow through and the wheels can go around and provide the power of God that we need. We must be open toward God, and open towards others, otherwise the power we need cannot be produced.

Let us Pray - O God, light of the minds that know you, life of the souls that love you, and strength of the hearts that seek you - bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen!

Last week's scripture reading told us that Jesus and His disciples were headed toward to villages of Caesarea Philippi and along the way He took an opportunity to teach them and to test them. Jesus asked them series of two questions, "Who do the people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?" Our response to that question, just as with the response of the disciples, speaks volumes to our relationship with Jesus and says much about our hearts and our faith. Immediately following this, Jesus instructs them to tell no one about the answer they have given and He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be

rejected, killed and after three days rise again. He made no attempt to sugarcoat this information; He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. In response, Jesus equated Peter's behavior to that of Satan himself, and told Peter that his actions do not show concern for the things of God but rather for the things of man.

Our gospel reading today tells us that again Jesus and his disciples are traveling, this time through Galilee, and again Jesus is teaching his disciples about how the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men, and be killed, and then on the third day rise. As we have seen so often with the twelve, the disciples did not understand what he meant - and in this instance were afraid to ask him about it.

So, instead of focusing on the what Jesus was trying to teach them, they began to argue amongst themselves; and we hear that when they arrived at Capernaum Jesus asked them about it, saying: "what were you arguing about on the road"?

But the disciples were silent because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest among them. I suppose that if I had witnessed the rebuke given to Peter earlier, I would have also been afraid to say anything. The argument was probably just silly nonsense that festered progressively into something more. Have you ever started off a discussion with a few friends and had it snowball into something bigger than you had intended and the next thing you know feelings are hurt or someone has walked out of the room? I've seen it happen dozens of times with students

and it was probably the same type of discussion here. The disciples lost their focus for a moment, but that was all it took to gain Jesus' attention.

Imagine, the Son of the One True God walks before you and you are debating who is the most important amongst yourselves. What standard would you even use to measuring such importance? Is the debate even one that can be won? Who is the most important among us today?

- Is it those who farm - are they the greatest; because they produce the milk and food we need to eat?
- Is it the teachers among us - are they the most important; because they train people in the various jobs they must do and provide them with the tools they need to learn new things with?
- Is it the doctors - should they be heralded above all others; because without them most diseases would be fatal?
- How about janitors and garbage men; without them we would choke in our own waste products?

What about our own Community of Faith? Who is the most important?

- Is it Andrew who formats and prints our bulletins each week; without him we wouldn't have all our announcements, our ongoing prayer requests, etc.?
- Is it Bobby who has taken charge of our media ministry; without him we wouldn't have music, or the new video setup, etc.?
- Is it the Pastor who brings the message each week; without him we wouldn't have the word brought to us?

It is an endless argument once you get into it, and one the disciples did well to remain silent about when confronted by the master.

Why this quest to determine who is most important? Why this quest to be number one? Why this quest to be better or more powerful than other people? Surely there must be more to life than this?

Jesus speaks of a different way of living and of thinking. After asking his disciples about what they were arguing about, He calls all twelve of them together and says to them:

"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

And then taking a little child and having him stand among them, he takes the child in his arms and says to them:

Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, does not welcome me, but the one who sent me.

Jesus called the twelve - and he is calling us today - away from our arguments about who is greatest, and who deserves more and who should call the shots and turns our mind instead to the question of our attitude and how willing we are to humble ourselves and to serve one another.

Children were not valued at the time of Jesus in the way they are today. They had no rights. There were no United Nations declarations about how they should be treated, and what it is that they deserve out of life.

Children were not the most important persons in their families, nor were they considered to be the greatest members of their society. Rather children were expected to be obedient to their parents and to help the family earn its living and to learn what the family expected them to learn. Their needs were subordinate to the needs of the entire family and their role in the family was one of subservience.

Does this attitude toward sound familiar? It should. It speaks to the very marginalization of society we spoke about last week. Who are the children today? The children of today can be seen as those who are disenfranchised; set aside, forgotten or ignored. The children of today can be seen in the faces of those people who are not highly regarded by society; that is, those that do not fit the mold of what society deems important. Who are those today that find themselves without a place of their own? Who today is seen as less important by our culture and very possible by some of us here today? They are those who find themselves forced into the margins of society, those social groups that encompass the poor, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Blacks, members of other disenfranchised groups, women and gays. LGBTQ people have for years been marginalized by their communities, their families, childhood friends, their government, their military and even by those who stand before them with the open arms of God; claiming to love their neighbors as themselves. That is until they discover that not all of their neighbors are upper middle class, white non

Hispanic, urbanites who are married with 2.5 children, a dog, a cat, a mortgage and members of the Republican Party.

There is one, however, who does not look upon you through clouded eyes, but rather sees you down deep for the child of God that you are and that one is Jesus, our Christ, our Messiah and Savior. Jesus, being God made flesh, knows that you were create in the very image of the triune God and that you, me, those who identify as LGBTQ, those who have been disenfranchised and marginalized by society are indeed His Children.

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children welcome me, and when you welcome me you are welcoming the one who sent me." God created us all in His image. When we look upon our fellow man, we look not on the faces of carbon based, biological organisms who evolved by change, but rather we look upon the face of God our Creator, Lord Jesus our Redeemer and the very Spirit of God which sustains us. Amen? Amen!

Jesus is saying that life in the Kingdom of God is not about being the greatest or the first... but rather about seeing other people as important; not to a specified degree - not in measurement, but rather in an absolute way, a way that ignores all distinctions. Life lived according to the way of Christ is a life of opening ones arms and welcoming people into our embrace - and showing them that we care and it works both ways! Those who have been disenfranchised are just as responsible for recognizing value in all people in the same way that we expect others to find value in us.

James 3:13 – 18 reads, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

Our theme for the upcoming ICCC Convocation in November is, “The Kingdom of God Breaking Forth. . .” Life in the kingdom is about opening the pipeline at both ends so nothing impedes the flow of power, the flow of love that produces the harvest we all need and desire; a harvest that comes when we live as peacemakers and sow the seeds of peace each day. To be a peacemaker, to enjoy the harvest of righteousness, requires an attitude of peace, an attitude of humility.

It requires the recognition that it is really only God who is important. When God leads you, do not argue amongst yourselves about who is most important. Rather seek Him and His will. Where should we seek Him? We should seek Him in the simple thing, in the lowly things and in the ordinary things of our everyday existence.

Oh, and by the way, when things don’t go according to our plans, when things do not turn out the way we think they should, don’t get made at

God. We might ask, "God why?" but we should do so with a heart of serious inquiry and not accusation. To be a peacemaker, to enjoy the harvest of righteousness, requires an attitude of peace! Don't make things worse by fueling the flames of discontent, but rather extinguish the flames through open dialogue, forgiveness and in most cases repentance for your own contribution to the conflict at hand.

You don't have to raise your hand, but I want to ask, "How many of you here today profess to be a Christian?" What does being a Christian mean? What is expected from us when we claim the name of Christ? The following is a poem that speaks about the attitude that Jesus calls those who bear his name to have.

When I say..."I am a Christian"
I'm not shouting "I am saved"
I'm whispering "I was lost"
That is why I chose this way.

When I say..."I am a Christian"
I'm not bragging of success.
I'm admitting I have failed
and cannot ever pay the debt.

When I say ..."I am a Christian"
I don't speak of this with pride.
I'm confessing that I stumble
and need someone to be my guide.

When I say..."I am a Christian"
I'm not claiming to be perfect,
My flaws are too visible
But, God believes I'm worth it.

When I say..."I am a Christian"
I'm not trying to be strong
I'm professing that I'm weak
and pray for strength to carry on.

When I say..."I am a Christian"
I still feel the sting of pain
I have my share of heartaches
This is why I speak His name.

When I say..."I am a Christian"

I do not wish to judge.

I have no authority.

I only know I'm loved.

What is it that you want out of life? What is it you want from God? I think that most of us are in constant search for a better life for ourselves and our families and our world. Most of us would like to feel more at peace, to have more joy and happiness, to see an end to discrimination, bigotry, poverty and the marginalization of society. Don't we want to see our children, and our children's children be able to grow up with enough to eat, and the ability to do what they want when they want, and don't we all hope that what they will want will be good for them and for those that they meet.

This can only come to us when we give up the world's standards of success as they measure who is the most important amongst us and in turn seek to humble ourselves as children to our Father in Heaven and learn from Him. We must not be like Peter and have our minds on the things of man, but rather we should have our minds on the things of God.

As long as there is discrimination amongst people, as long as there is judgment that decides that some are more important than others, as long as there is a desire amongst ourselves to be more important than others, as long as ambitions are motivated by self awareness rather than our

awareness of those around us, we block out what God has in store for us and our lives.

Jesus did not come among us as a king, as a boss, or as someone who felt that they were more important than others but rather he came to us as a servant. He came to touch, to embrace, to heal, to forgive, and to help, to love and all this even when he knew it would take him to the cross.

Our prayer should not be "make me someone important", nor should it be "give me wealth and success". Rather, knowing that God is fully able and fully willing to give us what we need in life, and that our God is found in those whom the world marginalizes, our prayer should be like that of St. Francis. Let us pray.

Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring your love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

Master, grant that I find consolation as I seek to console; that I find understanding as I seek to understand; that I find love as I seek to love with all my soul. Make me a channel of your peace for it is in pardoning that I am pardoned; in giving that I receive; and in dying that I am born to eternal life.

Blessed be God, who shows us the way in Christ Jesus, day by day by day. Amen!