

## Mark 9:30-37

<sup>30</sup>They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; <sup>31</sup>for 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.” <sup>32</sup>But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

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

For college, I went to Montreat College in beautiful Montreat NC. It's a small liberal arts college where every student on campus was required to take Bible 101 and 102 or intro to the Gospels. It was the first time most of us had looked at the bible as a whole or in a systematic way, instead of a book that contained memory verses. And when you do that, you notice some patterns. There was one guy, a baseball player, who liked trying to talk more than the professor. One day we were having a discussion and he made the comment “Jesus sure does spend a lot of time teaching his disciples and not much time doing anything else.” He was right. What we read in the gospels is Jesus basically teaching all the time. And when he's not teaching, he's sleeping or avoiding the crowds, trying to get away from people, recharge and then teach some more. But, when he is doing all this teaching, there's one thing Jesus seems to want to get across more than anything

else; and that is his identity as the Son of God and savior. He's trying to reveal to the disciples and everyone else his identity.

Our gospel reading today is about one recorded time when Jesus was trying to do just this. They are passing through Galilee which is where Jesus will be when he is arrested and crucified. He knows this is the place where all this will happen, so they pass through Galilee and get out of there because it's not his time yet. What he tells them is that he is going to be crucified, die and rise. But he's not telling them this, just to give them information. He's saying this with a much bigger purpose in mind. He wants them to know how about this sacrifice he is going to make for them so that they can truly be disciples of him.

He says to them, presumably while they are walking along, "The Son of Man". The disciples know he is talking about himself, because he always calls himself the Son of Man. "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." And they don't say anything in response. It says, "They did not understand what he was saying and they were afraid to ask." They weren't very eager to find out what he was talking about, were they? We generally guess that Jesus did most of his teaching ministry in one year's time and they are getting close to the end now, so you have to think the disciples are really pretty comfortable being disciples the way that they have been doing it up to this point. They are comfortable with their

understanding of who Jesus is thank you very much. So, they let the words hang up in the air for a bit and then drop with nothing but silence. That must have been disappointing for Jesus. These words are pretty provocative, don't you think. The Son of Man is to be betrayed, killed, risen?

But when the disciples learn the routine, they get comfortable. They are ready for school to get out, just like when you heard the school bell ring and you wanted to leave, the last thing you did was ask the teacher a question. So now Jesus gets quiet and all walk on a little further. Jesus then starts to hear what the disciples really think they are doing with him. While they are walking, the disciples argue about who was Jesus best disciple, the second in command. They are really suffering from selective hearing if they think this is what Jesus is about aren't they? He has talked about dying for them and they are talking about competing with each other. They really missed the point.

When Jesus asks them, "What were you talking about?" Naturally they get quiet again. They had been caught. They had been arguing and Jesus heard them. Jesus is going to make the ultimate sacrifice for them. It's gotta hurt him that they are arguing over whether they are the favorite and most worthy. Maybe it felt to him the way it feels to us when we hear about siblings quarreling over their parents' will. Any parent's one true wish would be for their children to love each other.

So then Jesus takes a child. Today, we help children because it is the right thing to do. We give children our love, so that they can grow to be productive adults. When we provide for their needs we do it because we love the children, especially our own children. We do not expect them to pay back the gifts or favors they receive. We treat them well for love's sake, not our own personal gain. But today we love our children because they need us. Our love is a gift to them that they need never pay back. So we love them. In Jesus' day, a child was at the bottom rung of the societal ladder. They had no societal status. Knowing a child could not help you get a good job or make you more important or compete in society. If you did a favor for a child, they could not pay it back. In Jesus' day, favors needed to be paid back. And children had no qualifications or real worth. In Jesus' day, many children were not loved or provided for.

So you want to be the most worthy to be my disciple? Then completely give up any idea of your own societal worth, love those with no worth, side with them, and become like them. Love the children and those who cannot pay you back in societal capital. Then will you be first of all. And you know how he says it, "Whoever wants to be first/best/greatest must be last/least, the servant of all. That's the gospel. Why does Jesus ask his disciples to do this? Only because he himself does this. Pick up your gospel and read all these stories about how Jesus consistently loves the least and the outcasts. And at this moment in the gospel of

Mark Jesus is on his final journey. He's going to do some more teaching, but he's on his way to the cross. He's going to be betrayed into human hands, he's going to die, and he's going to rise. And that is going to leave who exactly to care with their hands for the children and the grownups who act like children, and the grownups who have no choice but accept gifts from other adults because they can't ever have any hope of repaying those favors. –The Disciples- Jesus' hands picked up a child and held them. But Jesus' hands were then nailed to the cross. Whose hands were left? - The disciples- Mother Teresa was wise when she said, "Jesus has no hands but ours."

Jesus had his eyes on the end and that's why he wanted to turn the attention of the disciples away from themselves. If they really wanted to be his disciples then they would love what he loved. There were a lot of people who hung around Jesus, but very few of them were really his disciples. A disciple continues to do what the master started.

Before Jesus willingly went to the cross for us, he loved us humans by becoming one of us, eating with us and speaking for those who were mistreated. Jesus shows us how much he loved us by dying for us as our savior. We would be different people if we had not met Jesus Christ in our own lives, wouldn't we? But we are different people because we have been saved and given new lives. Just like Peter could never turn back to those fishing nets; we too are saved from a life

in which we are satisfied without Christ. We are in fact saved, Christ died and rose for us. How does being saved change your outlook on life?

Some of you may have seen the movie Saving Private Ryan. We learn that Private Ryan is the youngest of 4 brothers fighting in World War II. His three older brothers have already been killed in action earlier in the week. That's enough death for one family, so when it comes to Joint Chief of Staffs attention, he orders that Private Ryan be found and sent home to his family. Several soldiers are sent to find him wherever he is, so that they can save him and spare his mother the heartbreak of losing all her sons. The story of the movie begins as Private Ryan who is now a grandfather goes to Normandy to visit the grave of one of the men who was commissioned to save his life. The men found him and successfully saved him, but after finding him, they all died trying to get him back alive. Tears roll down his face as he asks his wife, Is he a good man? Has his life been worth the deaths of these brave men? They reassured him so. His wife and grandchildren reassure him so. How much is one life worth?

The gospel message is that God thought your life was worth the death of Jesus. And it really doesn't matter whether you believe your life is worth the death of Jesus. Jesus died for you. It's hard to know what to say in response to a sacrifice made for you isn't it?

We somehow want to repay our debts don't we? What do I owe? What do I need to do? Nothing. There is no way Private Ryan could ever really repay those men for what they did. So, you know what he did with his life was probably the same thing many soldiers who came back without friends did. He tried to live out their wishes, whether it was bringing a valuable item to a friend's child, or giving a message, or fulfilling a promise to deliver a 'letter to my wife should something happen to me.' The living can only say thank you and be the hands as best they can of the deceased. We cannot say thank you enough to Jesus, but we can be his hands.

Jesus' vision was to go to the cross for us all, leave us with his peace given to us mysteriously through the Holy Spirit, and know that we will continue to be his hands in the world.

Of course that's a lot of responsibility, but how else do we say thank you than to love like Jesus loved. What do we owe Jesus? Nothing Jesus left us owing nothing. He has given us a life we could have never had otherwise. With that life we continue Jesus' life. Jesus picked up a child and said if you love this child, you love me and not only me but the one who sent me. If you love the least, then you are my disciples.

Have any of you ever read "The Rainbow Fish?" This book is about the most beautiful fish in the ocean. His scales were every shade of blue, green, and purple with sparkling silver scales mixed in. He was very beautiful, but he was also very selfish and self-centered. He was so beautiful that he thought he was too good to play with the other fish in the ocean.

One day a little blue fish asked Rainbow Fish for one of his beautiful, shimmering scales -- but he refused. Because of his selfishness, he was very unpopular with the other fish. He was not only the most beautiful fish in the ocean, he was also the loneliest fish in the ocean.

He told Starfish about his problem and Starfish sent him to talk to a wise old octopus. The octopus told Rainbow Fish that if he wanted to be happy, he should give one of his beautiful scales to each of the other fish. Rainbow Fish just could not imagine giving away his beautiful scales.

Once again, the little blue fish asked for one of Rainbow Fish's scales. He hesitated for a moment, but finally pulled off one of his scales and gave it to the little blue fish. When the other fish saw the little blue fish with a shiny scale, Rainbow Fish was surrounded by fish asking for one of his shiny scales. Before he knew it, he had given away all of his shiny scales except for one. Suddenly he realized that although he was no longer the most beautiful fish in the ocean, he was happier than ever before.

This story reminds me of something that Jesus said to his disciples. One day He heard his disciples arguing about which of them would be the greatest in God's kingdom. Jesus said to them, "If you want to be first, you must be last and you must be the servant of all." He then put his arms around a little child and told his disciples, "If you welcome one of these, you welcome me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one that sent me."

Sometimes we think the most important thing is to be the first, to be the most beautiful, to be the smartest, or to be the GREATEST! That isn't what Jesus said. He said that the most important thing was to think of others first and ourselves last.

If we want to be great in God's sight, we should seek to be a servant rather than seeking to be served.

Dear Jesus, help us to remember that to be the greatest, we must be willing to be the least. Amen.