

February 24, 2019
#62
Mark 9:30-37
Good News: New math

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

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

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child 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.

Have you ever thought that what Scripture teaches us, what Jesus says to us, is very ridiculous to the world.



Take a look at Luke 6.

***The poor are blessed and the rich are cursed.
The hungry are blessed and the full are cursed.***

***Those who weep are blessed and those laughing are cursed
The persecuted are blessed and the popular are cursed.***

Last Tuesday I went to a hockey game with my mentees from the middle school. Let me tell you, the players definitely were not that religious. I was convinced one of the requirements to be a hockey player is not to love your enemy. Being the servant and last was definitely not a rule they had to follow.

In last Sunday's Bible reading we prayed together with a father, who had a son possessed by an evil spirit. He said to Jesus: "I believe, help me to overcome my unbelief". We all were encouraged to have faith and to practice fasting. We are admonished to pray before we need to pray so we can have a heart that is ready to be dependent on God and filled with faith in Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit

Do you know somebody who repeatedly lies to you? Perhaps you know someone who disappointed you many times. When it comes to trusting that person, do you easily believe her/him? Usually what I say is: "I choose to believe."

God does not lie, but maybe you feel like God has disappointed you for some reason. Maybe He did not answer your prayer the way you think should have or the way your life is going you do not have strong faith. Maybe you just do not have enough evidence for you to truly believe. As we dive into the Word of God, would you keep your heart and mind open?

In the verses 30 and 31 Jesus predicts his death and resurrection for a second time. The first time was in Mark 8. Jesus wanted to let the disciples know and hopefully to understand. He did not have much success.

Mark 9:32 says: "But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it". Why did they not ask Jesus? My first guess is they did not want to look stupid in front of the other disciples.

Does that sound familiar? I am not going to these Bible studies because I do not know as much as all the other people. I am not asking that question because it is a stupid question. Algebra and geometry were not my friends. I felt so stupid that I stopped asking. I stopped learning. One thing I know: If you are not going the right way, you are going the wrong way. If you are not focusing on what Jesus is saying you are focusing on what others are saying.

One of the most difficult lessons for us to learn is that there is no such thing as a stupid question. If you do not ask, you will not understand.

So if you are not asking questions about Jesus, you become distracted by secondary matters such as greatness.

Jesus asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?”³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

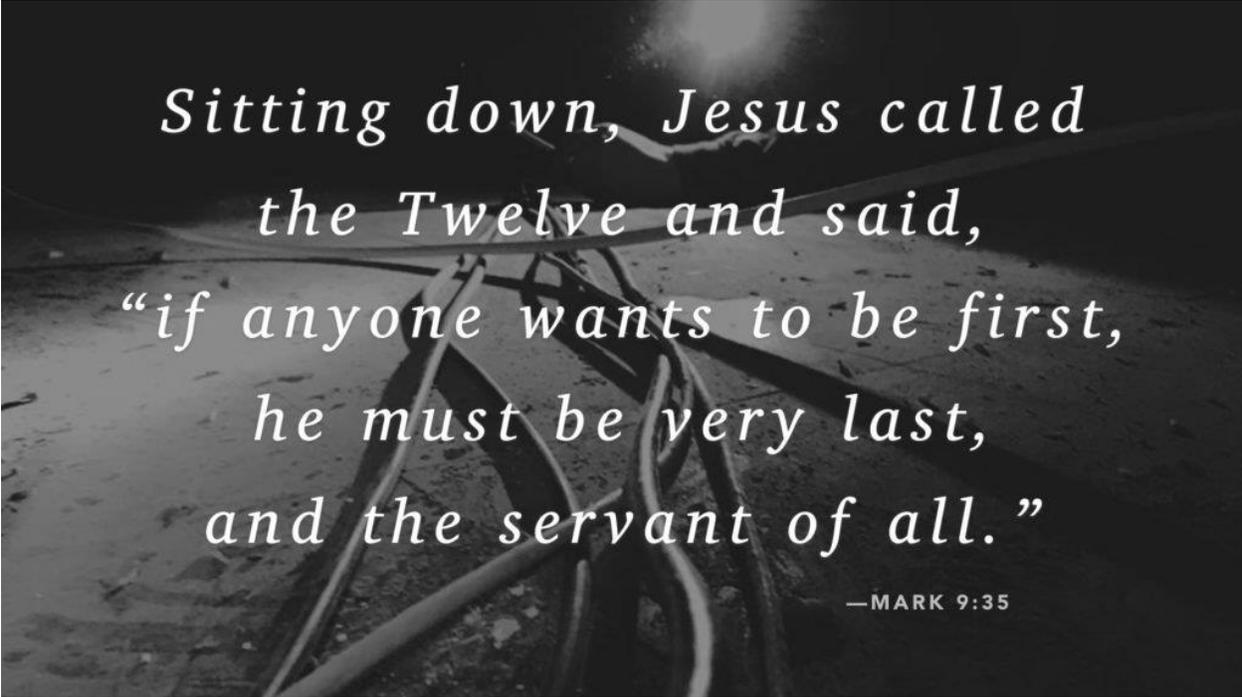
We must remember the context. We know the end of the story. They did not. They thought Jesus was the long awaited Messiah who would restore Israel to the greatness of Solomon’s kingdom. Jesus could do anything – walk on water, raise the dead, cast out demons. The apostles had been chosen by Jesus to be His closest friends. That meant they would have places of honor in the court of the new king.

Suffering and dying are not part of the equation in that context so they did not bother to ask for clarification.

“What were you arguing about?”

How difficult it is to not compare yourself to others. How hard it is for siblings to feel that their parents love them equally and try very hard to treat them equally. How hard is in the church not to feel that somebody is greater and better or more spiritual than you are. Even worse, sometimes we think we are better. I can totally understand why disciples would be arguing. Jesus only took Peter, James, and John up the Mountain of Transfiguration? Maybe it was because Jesus told Peter that he would build his church on the rock of Peter’s confession? How would you feel? How do you feel if you are truly serving God and you are not as blessed as the person you think is not as good of a Christian?

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”



*Sitting down, Jesus called
the Twelve and said,
“if anyone wants to be first,
he must be very last,
and the servant of all.”*

—MARK 9:35

Jesus sits down. He takes the position of a Teacher, of a Rabbi. He tells them an opposite math, a new math that shows how to get up, go get more...

Do you believe moving up requires you to move down?

I was thinking about how we use the word *down*. Right now, we're in a **down economy** with a down market. If somebody messes up, it is called a **downfall**. If a team is on a losing streak, we say they are in a **downslide**. If a neighborhood is losing value, we say it is going **downhill**. If you get let go from your job, it is called **downsizing**. When you are not doing great in life, you're **down and out, or downhearted**. And when you die, where do you go? **Down under!**

The world screams and tells us: **down is down**.

Our goal in life is to get, not give. I am such a struggling disciple. So many times I also think that I need to get instead of giving. We want to acquire, not release. We want to add, not subtract. Less isn't more; it's just less, right?

As I have told you, I went to the hockey game with middle school teenagers from our mentoring program. During the hockey game there was not much love.

I still had the opportunity to practice love. The teenagers of course got hungry. Praise God, the leader brought ham sandwiches, chips and apples for them to eat. We as leaders did not eat because we wanted to be sure kids got enough.

Before long I got pretty hungry too. I thought, well, even if food is insanely expensive at the Fairgrounds, I will get something. The healthiest thing I saw was chicken tenders. I purchased these. I am coming back to my seat and sit next to my lovely teenagers. I saw their eyes staring at my meal. I do not know how about you, but I am not very happy to share a meal when I am very hungry. These tenders are all I have.

Thoughts swirled in my head. Well, they are not starving. They just ate ham sandwiches. There is nothing wrong with me eating. Just ignore the looks.

I have another voice in my head, too. It said: "Jolita, didn't you pray this morning of the opportunities to show love? Didn't you pray and asked me to bring people to you so you can show love the way they will understand? I am not kidding, you can go to my morning devotionals on Tuesday and hear what I said to myself and those who listened. That's what I exactly said.

It is easy to give when you have plenty. It is easy to share when your stomach is full. I gave my chicken tenders to these teenagers around me and they devoured it all. I managed to enjoy a few fries.

There is not much serving or love in a game but you can always serve others around you. It does not matter what the world does or thinks you need to do. Jesus says: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all".

Let's think about time. What do you do to avoid giving up even a minute of your time? Do you scan the checkout lines at the grocery store to find the shortest one? Do you eat fast food, not because it's good, or even because it's cheap, but because it's fast? Do you pull your car into another lane so you won't have to wait on a truck? Does green mean "go," and yellow mean "speed up"? How many decisions do you make simply on the basis of whether or not it will save you time? Time is everything to us.

How much time do we waste willingly and consciously for the things like internet? TV? Games? Gossip?

One thing that struck me most was this: we don't think serving will give us the life we long for. We are afraid that if we give, we will lose. "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

I would not starve to death by just not eating for a few more hours. There was a leftover apple which I ate. What I gained was a relationship with those around me. What I lost was not much, but what I gained was bigger than I probably realize. The youth around me looked at me differently and the distance between me and them was much smaller.

There is a popular acronym: JOY. It stands for Jesus first, Others second, Yourself third. Like so much of Jesus' teaching it does not make sense to the world. Yet, **self-denial is a core factor in knowing joy.**

Jesus took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child 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.



Children had no legal protection. A child had no status or rights. A child certainly had nothing to offer anyone in terms of honor. By bringing the child as an example, Jesus asks us to welcome those who are most vulnerable and needs our help the most. It could be a child, it could be a teenager, or an elderly person. It could be a man or a woman. The most important thing for us to understand is what it means to be great in God's kingdom.

Do you believe enough to live that way? Are you able to welcome the vulnerable and the down and out? Can you serve?

The way to honor in the Kingdom of God is to love the least, the lost and the lonely.

I believe, help my unbelief. Help us, Lord, to believe that serving is gaining and giving is getting. Help us to think new math that will help us to be disciples and make disciples.