

JESUS CONTINUES TO SERVE US TODAY
Sermon for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost, 2018
Mark 9:30-37

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, Mark 9:30-37: ³⁰ **They left that place and were passing through Galilee, and Jesus did not want anyone to know about it.** ³¹ **For He was teaching His disciples and telling them: “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, but, after He has been killed, He will rise on the third day.”**

³² **They did not understand what He said and were afraid to ask Him.**

³³ **Then they came to Capernaum. When He had come into the house, He asked them, “What were you discussing on the road?”**

³⁴ **They kept quiet. For on the road they had been discussing who the greatest was.** ³⁵ **Jesus sat down and called the Twelve. He told them, “If anyone wants to be the first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all!”**

³⁶ **He took a little child and set him among them. He put His arms around him and told them,** ³⁷ **“Whoever welcomes one of the little children like this one in My name welcomes Me. Whoever welcomes Me welcomes not Me but the One who has sent Me.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth, Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus’ time on this earth was running short. Not long from now, He would be **delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, but, after He has been killed, He will rise on the third day**. Jesus knew that the time was fast approaching when He would make that last Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem where He would offer Himself on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

Even though Jesus taught this to the disciples, nevertheless, ³² **they did not understand what He said and were afraid to ask Him**. This was the second time Mark records Jesus as speaking explicitly concerning His coming passion. The other time was when Jesus made this remark, and Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him. Jesus responded by saying to Peter, “*Get behind Me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men,*” (Mark 8:33). Nothing would stop Jesus from going the way of the cross.

We should not be too quick to criticise the disciples for the way they behaved, nor should we be inclined to ask, “How could the disciples miss the meaning of these words?” It is so easy for us with our 20/20 hindsight, to be critical of those disciples, but we really need to cut them a little slack.

Whenever we gather for worship, whether it be on a Sunday, or through the week, or even at a wedding or funeral, every time faithful pastors preach, their message must always be to proclaim Christ. A faithful pastor will at all times and in all places proclaim Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins, a Saviour who has been delivered over to death and raised for our justification.¹ Christ alone has opened the way to heaven for us all. This is the beginning, middle, and end of our Christian faith. When the Holy Spirit plants faith in us, Christ crucified and risen from the grave becomes the core of our being. Christ’s core teaching of justification through faith becomes the centre from which all other teachings of the Christian faith receive their authority. We believe, teach, and confess that we are justified before God only through faith in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us. No other religion confesses this truth.

With the suffering, death, and resurrection at the core of everything we do as Christians, it is often difficult for us to imagine the state of mind of God’s people during the time leading up to these salvation events. Back then, the people knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but they *did not know what that meant*. It did not enter their minds that the Messiah would be executed by the state. Too often, their idea of salvation was salvation from the tyrannous rule of Rome, not the tyranny of sin. Too often, their idea of the Kingdom of God was a return to the theocracy of Israel under Moses or

¹ Romans 4:25

King David. They did not understand the words that Jesus would say to Pilate: *“My kingdom is not of this world,”* (John 18:36).

Given that we have 20/20 hindsight, why is it that we still fall into the same trap that the disciples demonstrated in the second part of today’s Gospel? As Jesus and His disciples returned to their headquarters in Capernaum, Jesus asked them, **“What were you discussing on the road?”** ³⁴ **They kept quiet. For on the road they had been discussing who the greatest was.**

Why were they concerned about the matter of greatness?

Not only was it very human, but perhaps Jesus’ own actions had suggested it. For the second time, He had taken three of them aside as special witnesses. That was when He went onto the mountain and was transfigured² - the first was when He had healed Jairus’ daughter.³ The events of the transfiguration must have intrigued the nine even more, since the three did not report what had happened there. And then there had been Jesus’ own words to Simon, calling him ‘Peter,’ a rock.⁴ All this was puzzling to men who as yet did not know the whole story as we do. The disciples had not yet witnessed the crucifixion and the resurrection. They did not understand that Jesus must die for their sins. They did not yet have the complete picture. They were jockeying for positions of importance in God’s Kingdom as they saw it. Yes, they were wrong. They were acting out of selfishness and pride. But at least they were consistent with the way they perceived the world. They did not understand Jesus’ words and their errors were consistent with that misunderstanding.

Jesus used the discussion among the disciples as an opportunity to teach them and us what it means to be the greatest in His church. He said, **“If anyone wants to be the first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all!”** ³⁶ **He took a little child and set him among them. He put His arms around him and told them,** ³⁷ **“Whoever welcomes one of the little children like this one in My name welcomes Me. Whoever welcomes Me welcomes not Me but the One who has sent Me.”**

Jesus gave the disciples an answer entirely different than what they had expected. In the kingdom of heaven, greatness is not a matter of titles and authority. To be first means to be last, to be a servant. No service is too lowly. Service means sacrificing your time, your talents, yourself for the sake of others, even when they do not realise or appreciate it. Yes, even helping a child in Jesus’ name spiritually, physically, or emotionally is great in the kingdom of God. When you do so in Jesus’ name, that is, because you love Jesus, then you not only welcome Jesus into your heart and life but also the Father who sent Him. What could be greater? But it’s the complete opposite of how the world looks at it. It was a lesson Jesus felt compelled to give His disciples again and again.⁵ That Jesus used a child to illustrate His answer also brings a needed lesson to our own age, an age with so many unwanted children and with a murderous mania for aborting children. It is only those who are members of the kingdom of heaven through faith in Christ Jesus who have the right answer and the right motivation. What greater reason can we have for sharing the Gospel?

So how do you think we are doing? Are we willing servants? If we are servants, do we serve because we *want* to share God’s love with others or do we serve so that people will *notice* us and tell us how wonderful we are? Do we get angry when we serve, and yet people fail to acknowledge our contribution? Do we serve with all our heart or is our service only skin deep? How are we doing as servants?

What about the other symptoms of our arrogance? How do we respond when a loving brother or sister points out that we are not in agreement with the teachings of Christ? Do we thank them and confess our error before God and receive His forgiveness, or do we become angry and stubborn? Do we label others as divisive when we are the ones who have caused the division by straying from the teachings of Christ? Are we arrogant enough to place ourselves in judgment over the very Word of God rather than submit to it in humility?

We come up with plenty of excuses. Unlike the disciples at that point in time, we know that Christ died on the cross for our sins. We know that He rose from the dead. We have heard this Gospel before and we know that the role of a Christian is to serve others. Nevertheless, we are still arrogant. We even consider ourselves to be judges of God when His teachings are not what we want them to be. We consider ourselves to be the greatest - even greater than the teachings and revelation of the God who has created us.

² Mark 9:2-13

³ Mark 5:21-43

⁴ Matthew 16:17-18

⁵ see Mark 10:43-44; Matthew 23:8-12; Luke 22:24-27.

Even though we are arrogant and self-righteous, God still wants to rescue us. He still wants us to be part of His family. He still wants to rescue us from our own arrogance and all our other sins. That is why He has sent His Son to become one of us in this world.

God has sent His only Son to be the servant we could never be. The Holy Spirit inspired Isaiah to speak of Him before He was even born: ¹³ *“Look! My Servant will be successful. He will be high, be lifted up, and be highly exalted....³ He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised, and we thought of Him as nothing. ⁴ Surely He has taken on Himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered Him to be wounded, struck down by God and afflicted. ⁵ However, He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings. The chastisement that brought us peace was on Him, and through His wounds we have been healed. ⁶ We have all gone astray, like sheep. Each one of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all, (Is. 52:13, 53:3-6).*

God came down to this earth to serve us and we beat Him, whipped Him, and hung Him on a cross. Nevertheless, He served us perfectly. He deserved service from us, but He served us with His life. He sacrificed Himself in order to save us from our sins. Although He deserved to be first, He made Himself last for us. This perfect servant who sacrificed Himself for us is Jesus Christ - the same Jesus Christ who hugged children and told us to welcome them as we would welcome God the Father.

Jesus Christ, the Perfect Servant, sacrificed Himself on the cross in order to save us from the condemnation of our imperfect service. God the Father honoured the service of His sacrifice by calling Him out of the grave. Christ rose from the dead to eternal life. God the Father now sees our service as perfect. For Christ's sake, He now deems us worthy to receive Him even if it is in the guise of a little child.

Jesus Christ, our Saviour who was once dead, but now lives forevermore, continues to serve us today. He serves us daily with the forgiveness of our sins. He serves us with His Word, the Holy Scriptures. He serves us with His life-giving body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of the sacrament. Finally, when the last day comes, He will serve us with a new, holy body that will rise from the dead just as He rose, and we will finally serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

O God our Father, Lord of all, the creator and sustainer of all things in heaven and on earth, we bow before You in worship, and bring before You our praise and our prayers. In the name of Your only Son Jesus Christ, we ask You to forgive us our many sins, and to rescue us from what we deserve because of them. Come into our lives with Your power, and save us from the temptations and dangers that threaten us.

We recognise our own weakness and know we need Your help. Without Your strength we can do nothing. Therefore, give us the power and blessing of Your Holy Spirit, so that we may stand in the grace You gave us in Baptism, and that we may live a life that measures up to the standard You set when You called us to faith. Inspire us with the Gospel about Your delivering up the Son of Man into the hands of sinful men. Because we humbly receive all spiritual blessings from You, take away our stubborn self-wills, and lead us to do Your perfect will. Take away our pride and conceit, and make us humble. Take away our critical and grumbling spirit, and make us content. Take away our resentment and anger, and make us gentle and patient. Help us in love to put up with each other's faults and weaknesses, as people who have been made rich by Your love.

Pour out Your blessing on Your Church, O God. By the Spirit's power, make us one in heart and mind, in the peace of Christ. Enable us to grasp the Church's oneness in Christ in the truth of the Gospel. Take away from us our pride and sinful desire for pre-eminence. Inspire us by Jesus' humble service to us to serve You gratefully through serving our neighbours. Give us opportunities to demonstrate the confession of the Gospel before the world, that people may be drawn to Your Son and rejoice in Your salvation.

Give Your guidance and blessing to all lawful authority, especially to our Queen and her representatives, and the parliaments of our Commonwealth and State. Give them wisdom and sound judgment, that godliness may rule and evil be kept in check. Frustrate any desires they have to act contrary to Your revealed will.

Be the guardian of our homes and families. Make them places where Your Word is treasured, where faith in You produces love, and where love expresses itself in service to You and others.

Touch with Your healing power the sick, the sorrowing, and the suffering. Hear their cry, and remember them in Your mercy. Show them that You are the ever-present source of help, and the saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

Look with mercy on the parched land and send us refreshing rain.

These things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 11:18-20

¹⁸ Because the LORD revealed this to me, I became aware of it. Then You showed me what they were doing. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, I had been like a trusting lamb being led to the slaughter. I did not know that they had been plotting against me, saying: "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit! Let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may not be remembered any longer!" ²⁰ However, O LORD of hosts, You judge righteously. You test the inner being and the heart. Let me see Your retribution on them! For I have made my case known to You.

James 3:13-4:10

¹³ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him by his good conduct show that his works are done in humble wisdom! ¹⁴ However, if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth! ¹⁵ This "wisdom" does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. ¹⁶ For where there is jealousy and selfishness, disorder and every evil practice are there. ¹⁷ The wisdom that comes from above is, first of all, pure, then peaceful, gentle, willing to obey, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and without pretence. ¹⁸ Those who make peace are also sowing a harvest of righteousness in peace.

^{4:1} Where do wars and where do fights come from among you? Do they not come from this, from your desires for pleasure, which wage war among your members? ² You desire and do not have. So, you murder. You try to get something and cannot obtain it. So, you quarrel and wage war. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you are asking wrongly, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

⁴ Adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wants to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think the Scripture says without reason: "God jealously longs for the Spirit, whom He has caused to dwell in us"? ⁶ However, He gives more grace. Therefore, it says, "God opposes proud people but gives grace to humble people." ⁷ Therefore, be subordinate to God! Resist the Devil! He will flee from you. ⁸ Go near to God! He will come near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double minded people! ⁹ Be miserable, mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into gloom! ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord! He will lift you up.

Mark 9:30-37

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