

mark 9:30-37

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Sept. 29, 1985

And they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus said to his disciples, "I have seen that Jesus was attracted to him. Jesus was not satisfied that Jesus wanted them to see Jesus. Jesus asked them, 'But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest.' Jesus wanted to know what Jesus hid behind the curtain. Jesus had kind of forgotten Jesus and the kingdom of God."

The house is pretty, the paint fresh and new, the grass green, the shrubs well trimmed. But what is it like inside those walls? Are the timbers rotten, do mice scamper to and fro, is there garbage piled in the corners, a heaven and haven for flies.

What were you discussing on the way? But they were silent, *for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest.* ~~Jesus asked them. But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest.~~ ~~Jesus wanted to know what Jesus hid behind the curtain. Jesus had kind of forgotten Jesus and the kingdom of God.~~

Sometimes I imagine that people can see inot me. See past that exterior I present to the world and see deep inside all the nooks and crannies within. It scares me to think that. No place to hide the trash and garbage. No chance to temper the emotions. No way to make the ambition.

What were you discussing? Jesus asked them. But they were silent, *for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest.* ~~Who's the greatest. We play that game over and over and over again. It is the game for our land and our time.~~ Who's the greatest. This afternoon thousands will gather and watch men play a game in the hope that they will be able to stand and shout, "We're number one!"

In sports the game is open and obvious, and though bodies are bruised and sometimes broken, the damage is not so great.

We play the game also with a deck of cards, seeking to determine who is the greatest for a hand, or an evening. Most often little harm is done, unless tempers flare or needed money is lost.

Sometimes farmers play who is the greatest with their neighbors. And business men. and churches. and pastors. Over a coffee cup or over a drink at the bar, we tear apart the good names of our friends and neighbors in the unspoken hope that as they are brought low, somehow that will raise us up.

And we play the game with clothing, and homes and our children. I'm better because what I have is better, more stylish, more successful than yours.

~~But for twelve men walking along, being holier and closer to Jesus must have seemed the key to greatness.~~ *So 12 men walked along, discussing.* Maybe Peter, James and John said, "You notice who was there when ^{Jesus} ~~he~~ ~~was~~ was transfigured on the mountain. Or maybe Andrew reminded Peter, "I was the one who told you about Jesus, if it wasn't for me you would never have known him. Whatever their reasons, each one of them in his heart of hearts somehow knew that he was special, just not the same as all the rest. Greatest.

But Jesus said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

The PhD from Harvard spoke to us. We had just finished our meal of filet of Prime Beef, each serving at least a pound. Before that had been the champagne, all paid for by ~~tax~~ A Lutheran Insurance Company. As pastors you will be used and abused. That's all he promised. Used and abused. And we all nodded and felt somehow, better and closer to Jesus for having heard his words. Used and abused.

It's anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.
How many times they feel just that way. Women whose husbands drink because they need to. And when she comes to talk to me she is carrying the whole world on her shoulders, and most of all him, He is not responsible, she knows, so she has decided she must be responsible for him. So she serves him, and gets more bitter and brittle and truly helped him not one little bit, nor herself either for that matter as she lives out being the greatest servant in his life.

If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.
I sometimes wonder if I'm not acting out that same role as the transients

come to my door and tell their tales of bad luck and misfortune. Through the generosity of the woman of the clothes closet I provide food and gas and a motel room for them and help them learn that it's easier to get something for nothing. It only breaks them down further, I suspect,

Jesus said, If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

I think of all the ways we seek to live this out as pastors and wives, and friends and neighbors and how often our helping only makes the helped more dependent, less responsible. I think of these words of Jesus and think how perverse I have become when I use helping others as the means for achieving my own feelings of greatness.

If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all. I used to think Jesus was talking about me, that if I was used and abused enough that I would get to march into the kingdom in the front row. Who's the greatest is still the game, only with a different set of rules.

Whata fool. If anyone would be first, Jesus said, he must be last of all and servant of all. Was he talking about us? Could ~~we~~ possibly be first in the kingdom of God? Of course not! Jesus was telling us about himself, he who suffered and died ~~was~~ servant of every one. He is the servant of all, ~~he is the savior~~, he is the one this world needs, ~~not you and I.~~ no us the savior, not me, not the wife of some alcoholic.

The time for games is over. Jesus, the one who is first, receives you. Nothing ~~I~~ could ever do or be or accomplish could ever approach the value of that. Jesus receives ~~us~~. I could become president, or a failure, win every award or not a single one, next to his open arms nothing ~~comparable.~~ also finally with a

And he took a child and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms he said to them, "Whoever receives on such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me receives him not me but him who sent me."

You really want to do something that matters to God? Receive a child. What you do for a single child, you do for God. The bands won't play, there will be no parade, they won't put up a statue in your honor, but God will know. That's enough, that's everything.