

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

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

I'm not a "Everything that happens was meant to be" kind of person. I do not believe that the script for our lives is all written for us before we live it, and that we are just actors, playing the part we were given. We experience life as full of different possibilities. We make choices, our choosing affects what happens next...but not always in the way that we intend.

*Jesus said to his disciples, "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."*

These words of Jesus make it sound as if I am wrong about what I just said - for Jesus is speaking as if the script is already written for him - betrayal, death, rising.

And in a sense it was written, but only if Jesus chose to be faithful.

Jesus had the choice of running away - the choice of being like Jonah and going away from Jerusalem. Jesus could have armed himself to fight, died in battle like millions of others rather than on the cross. Jesus could have taken his own life swiftly, less painfully. But Jesus trusted in God and that led to betrayal, death, rising.

But today we are not focusing so much on Jesus and his choices, but on the disciples and their choices.

Jesus told them that he was going to be betrayed, killed, and rise again. And we read, *"But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him."*

They had made a choice - to be silent. They were the students in the classroom who when what the teacher says makes no sense think about something else. It is easier that way - less effort required.

They could have been direct, admitting, “We are confused, Jesus. Is there some meaning or purpose to your dying? Is there some reason for it? Explain to us Jesus.”

Or they could have chosen to talk it over with one another.

But instead they chose to talk about which of them was the greatest.

That is always fun - paying king of the mountain - dreaming of our own importance. They had no concern about Jesus, only about themselves. He had told them the most important thing of his whole life, the most important thing that would ever happen in all of history. And they chose to be interested in what was small and trivial – their glory.

But Jesus did not give up on them. *“What were you arguing about on the way?” he asked. But they were silent.*

They knew, they were ashamed. Jesus spoke a word to help them in their choosing, *“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them and taking it in his arms he said, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”*

Jesus sought to put new choosing into them, seeking not greatness, but service, not their own importance but serving the ones who were the least.

Jesus told them this because it was possible for them to follow him.

But they did not.

In my Bible I glance just two columns over from where we are and I read these words: *People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them.*

Bad disciples - shame on them. They were making the wrong choices.

That is what happened. But these words were written down, saved, so that we could learn from them.

Before us we have the scriptures, the telling of Jesus giving his life for us and of so much that God has done. Yet as Jesus present day disciples how often we may get distracted by how our needs are being met in this community of faith. Our minds and our words may be focused on whether others like what I'm doing, or whether I like what they are doing. We may get very concerned whether others regard us as important, whether they are friendly to me, whether being with them makes me feel good. The church of Jesus Christ can become so concerned about self and self-fulfillment that God takes a back seat here.

And our neighbors as well.

We are choosing. Each day we are choosing.

We could choose to focus on service, and study of the scriptures, and prayer for all who are in need. We could choose to make sacrificial gifts for the hungry. We could choose to provide a school in the inner city. Nothing is fixed; all sorts of possibilities are open - even the possibility of running from what God would have us do.

Or we could row against the current as Jesus did. We can ask whether God approves of how we invest our time and our resources. We can listen to Jesus.

So if we have all these choices what happens? Why didn't the disciples listen? Why did humans crucify the only Son of God? Why does the church of Jesus Christ wander astray so often?

It all goes back to the garden of Eden, the promise of the serpent, "You will be like God." We trust in our own spirit, our own judgement, seek our own glory and Jesus can do nothing with us but die for us. His words fall on deaf ears; instead of being servants and last we are vying to be the greatest. We cannot listen to any words but his plea, "Father, forgive them."

"If there is some other way," Jesus pleaded, but there is no other way than for Jesus to suffer for you and me.

How hard this is for me to believe. Taking the last place, serving you, loving my neighbor looks so close. I can imagine a congregation where everyone would have the attitude of servant and there would be perfect peace and harmony and we would accomplish miracles for God. I can imagine that, but as soon as I do I hate myself and you for failing. And instead of love my heart fills with bitterness.

That is the difference between Jesus and us. Jesus has the dream for us to be servants of one another, but when we fail, Jesus is not all bitterness and condemnation but he is the one who in love gives his life for us.

Maybe, when his spirit rules in us the same will happen in me, in you. Maybe instead of bitterness God can breathe love into our hearts even when others trample us on the way to their glory in the church. Maybe then the little and the least will be welcomed,

And God will be truly worshipped.