

Homily 17th Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 20 - Year B  
Christ Episcopal Church  
Towanda, Pa.  
Rev. Betsy Welliver Sentigar  
Sept. 19, 2021  
**Mark 9: 30-37**

1. In our Gospel today Jesus is offering his second prediction of the Passion to the disciples. This passage in Mark signifies the end of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee and he is providing instructions to the disciples who have followed him. The journey to the cross of the crucifixion in Jerusalem is close in time now. He instructs them not to tell anyone about his whereabouts. I've always wondered what purpose this had. It has left me with a curiosity for some time. What I found out was that this was necessary so that he could focus entirely on the disciples one last time in their home area. Time was running short and with all his might, Jesus tried to bring them into a sense of understanding how the Kingdom of God was to unfold. <sup>1</sup>
2. However, they were entirely incompetent in understanding the mystery of the cross and the unfolding of God's divine plan for him. Furthermore, in contrast to last week's reading where Peter, at least had the courage to push back at Jesus in his first Passion Prediction,

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Donahue, S. J., Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. Sacra Pagina - The Gospel of Mark pg.282-285

they could care less! They don't even raise a question about this. Jesus is not making any progress on his teachings to them whatsoever. Consequently, the disciples serve as a negative example in contrast to the positive one set forward by Jesus. <sup>2</sup>

3. Hindsight for us modern day Christians is clearer than it was for the disciples. We sense the tension in this scene and understand the folly of this brood arguing about their place of prominence inside their own group. Their culture dictated norms of hierarchy where status and honor signified great influence. This would have been a natural point of discussion for them as they completely misunderstood where this was all going. <sup>3</sup>

4. These disciples are in awe of the power of Jesus, his acts, his influence and want to share power, yet not understanding where it came from. In their confusion they argue who is to be the greatest and Jesus inverts the categories of power to the weakest perceived in

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

society - the children. Jesus continues “Welcome the children - whoever welcomes these welcomes God himself”.<sup>4</sup>

5. It is important to note that in first century Palestine children have a place of absolutely no social status or legal rights. We could conceptualize this as being a non person, totally dependent on others for nurture and protection. Jesus uses this non-status as an example to the disciples. He demonstrates the non-existent as worthy of respect and care.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus goes on” Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me”. The most insignificant of society carry respect and are important because they carry the name of Jesus and are held by him.

6. By extension then, Jesus goes even further: “Whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me”. There is a traditional chain of sending forth emissaries from rulers and communities. The word apostles means in fact, those who are sent. It was the ones who were sent who would be treated with dignity and respect whom Jesus claims that as he

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

has been sent by God, the emissaries who receive him also receive the children of God accordingly. <sup>6</sup>

These are the main points for today's gospel. As I contemplated all of this, I returned to James who sorts some of this out : “ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? This is a pivotal question James asks. It's almost like he's responding directly to the disciples confusion in that gospel scene.

James Finley (OFM) , a modern day mystic and contemplative teaches us that envy and self ambition are earthly, not steeped in works of peace but rather works of self propulsion. In our modern world radical individualism places self above community continuously, “What's in it for me?” Ego is running the show. Wisdom, however, brings a desire to rid oneself of the false self.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

Conflicts and disputes can run rampant in the different parts of ourselves. The inner turmoil, and angst create an exaggerated fear which can have us believe that the condition of our circumstances hold sway over our lives, the ultimate authority in our day to day existence. What is important to recognize as I have learned in my faith journey, is that in fact they absolutely do not hold authority.

Only God's deathless love of us has that authority in the life giving flame of our identity -which is Hidden with Christ in God. He sees our true face before we were born - that is our **deathless identity**.<sup>7</sup>

This brings liberation. As we know ourselves, the beloved of God then, we can respond to the reality of suffering. Our society is in great crisis - continual traumatization. Knowing ourselves loved then, we engage in loves work - not knowing the outcome but sustained by God's eternality in us and with us. This is the Good news for us, for this community, and for those we serve. We should not concern ourselves with knowing the outcome of God's plan, but just show up. As I referred to this last week, it

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<sup>7</sup> James Finely OFM - Turning to the Mystics Podcast

is the trust in an unknown future with reliance on the Spiritual authority of God's action in which we live and move, and have our being.

My prayer is that we can somehow bring this awareness to the consciousness of others that we meet not necessarily with words but through example. This is what I have learned is "Acquiring the Mind of Christ." It becomes an intention, not a passive stroke of good luck or fortune. It is not because someone deems themselves holy and pious, It requires, the humility and expectancy of a child who before Christ is powerless, vulnerable and loved. It also takes practice, community support, patience and forbearance. May we all carry within us the light of that child, and bring in to bear in our witness and servitude in Christ's name. Amen.