

**“Welcome”**  
**Mark 9:30-37**  
**Pollocksville Presbyterian Church**  
**Sermon #114**  
**9.19.21**

**Mark 9:30-37 CEB**

**30** From there Jesus and his followers went through Galilee, but he didn't want anyone to know it. **31** This was because he was teaching his disciples, “The Human One will be delivered into human hands. They will kill him. Three days after he is killed he will rise up.” **32** But they didn't understand this kind of talk, and they were afraid to ask him.

**33** They entered Capernaum. When they had come into a house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about during the journey?”

**34** They didn't respond, since on the way they had been debating with each other about who was the greatest. **35** He sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all.” **36** Jesus reached for a little child, placed him among the Twelve, and embraced him. Then he said, **37** “Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name

welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me."

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today's verses are Jesus' second prediction of his death in Mark's Gospel. If you can recall, last week's reading was our Savior's first prediction. From that point on, his eyes are set on Jerusalem and the second half of Mark's Gospel begins. We are barely a chapter away from last week's verses and already, Jesus predicts his death again. And, surprise...the disciples don't understand. They're

afraid to ask Jesus questions and continue to live in their ignorance.

On the way to Capernaum, Jesus asks the disciples “What are you arguing about?” His disciples don’t answer because they are engrossed in their own obsessions of power.

Do you suppose after Jesus predicts his death a second time, the disciples wonder who’s next in line? Do you think the disciples were so short-sighted in their bickering that they lost the big picture of Jesus’ ultimate purpose that he and he alone could defeat death through his death and resurrection? Could the disciples be obsessing over themselves so much that they start to believe they are masters’ of their own destinies?

It seems that the disciples are stuck. It seems that the disciples don't realize they are in a vicious cycle and they are content to stay in it. They didn't understand the first prediction of Jesus' death and Peter sticks his foot in his mouth by scolding Jesus. The disciples don't understand the second prediction of Jesus' death, either, and they fixate their thoughts on power, just like Peter did after the first prediction. And guess what! Jesus predicts his death a third time in chapter 10. The disciples still won't get it and obsess over power yet again!

Several weeks ago, I attended the Art of Transitional Ministry via Zoom, but Montreat Conference Center hosted it. We touched on a lot of topics, but one session was about how to get unstuck. During part of that session, the presenter talked about rackets. Rackets being fronts say, for example, a laundromat serving as a racket for the mafia. For family systems and other organisms like congregations, rackets are also a front, a cover for something else.

The presenter of this session gave us an example of a racket from a time earlier in her ministry. Turkey sandwiches were a staple for funeral dinners in a congregation this minister served years ago. Actually, they were more than staples, they were the only sandwiches allowed. Also, no one could simply “eye” or guess how much turkey to put on the sandwich or simply serve an alternative. It was never done any other way because it wasn’t allowed! One had to weigh the turkey meat before putting it on the sandwich. It had to be the exact weight. Every sandwich had to have an exact weight of turkey meat.

Well, after years and years of obsessing over minutia for this group of volunteers, the number of people to help serve food after funerals in this congregation started to dwindle. The people in charge of the food wouldn’t change their behavior. But over the years, they kept complaining that the young people weren’t stepping up to make these sandwiches. These funeral volunteers

found an easy target to blame: The next generation. It made them feel good to complain about someone else because they wouldn't have to own up to their behavior. This ongoing complaining by the group of volunteers was a racket for a deeper problem: The inability of letting go and stepping aside so a new generation of people could use their gifts of service.

So, there's the problem of no new people to help serve food after a funeral. The people who claim that the food must include these exactly-weighed turkey sandwiches and nothing else complain that the young people are lazy. The complaining makes these volunteers feel good or even superior..."holier than thou"...because they are the only one's doing the LORD's work, or so they think.

But, what's the cost of all this? Relationships. While these people certainly felt good in the short term, this harmful behavior continued

to cost future relationships being formed. It possibly cost them new people to join the congregation. This harmful behavior was accepted and encouraged over the various gifts others could contribute to serve others in their moments of grief.

The disciples were using their misunderstanding of Jesus' purpose as a racket to mask their quest for power, just as the people in the presenter's former church were blaming young people and using it as a front. Three times the disciples were confronted with the end of Jesus' earthly life. Three times they don't get it. Three times they stew over their own inflated egos and their quests for power. Thankfully for the disciples, Jesus is able to give them an important lesson that, while they may not understand, we can learn from their mistakes.

Did you notice what Jesus did in Mark 9:36? He reaches for a child. He EMBRACES the child. And the child is brought into the circle of the Twelve.

That is one of the kindest acts our Savior does in Mark. Jesus sees this young child who exhibits healthier behavior than those in Jesus' own circle of disciples. Jesus then turns the tables on his disciples who are consumed by power and selfishness and uses this child to prove to them that it is not the insiders who will be first among them, but the last and least will be first. And whoever welcomes those who have been marginalized welcomes the One who sent the Savior into the world.

This child had no claim of status or power. This child was not viewed as having any individuality in the first century world. This child, like other children, was thought of as lacking understanding.



Yet, the Suffering Servant sees a child who was not seen by others. The compassionate Savior of the world brings a child close to him and brings the child into the circle. Instead of rebuking the disciples, however, Jesus teaches them that with the faith of a child and with the heart of a servant, they will be first.

It's stewardship. Welcoming those who have been on the outside. Stewardship is not only about time, talent, and money. It's also about welcoming. Jesus saw, welcomed, and embraced that child. That embrace said so much without saying a word: I see you. I hear you. I love you. And I want you in my life.

We don't know what happened to the young child, but I can safely guess their life was changed forever. I can imagine the child playing an integral part in the early Church. Jesus, the Savior of the world, did what no one else would do: Welcoming this child into

the circle. And because of that seemingly small act, I can assume it meant the world to that child because the world, even Jesus' own followers, had ignored that child's gifts.

It's easy to obsess over things that don't really matter whether it's enough turkey on a sandwich to feed people after a funeral or who's going to be first. It's easy to obsess over the minutia and ignore the opportunities of ministry right under our noses, such as the people who stand outside our small circles. Yet, our Savior, the Suffering Servant, expands the circle wider and calls us to do the same.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.