

September 20, 2015

St. Mark 9:30-37: ***“They Didn’t Understand.
Let’s Make Sure We Do.”***

- I. The Significance of John 7:7.*
- II. The Unimportance of Being Important.*
- III. It’s a Matter of Service.*

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St. Mark 9:30-37

Dear Friends in Christ,

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen. - Martin Luther, Imperial Diet of Worms, Germany, 1521.

Those are great words, aren't they? We applaud them. We thank God for this one man who stood against an ocean of dark thinking and spiritual death. What Luther said was what few wanted to hear. What Luther said is what few want to hear.

During the past several decades the church experienced little criticism or conflict from the world, not because the world is more Christian, but because the world and church are so much alike. We long to be loved so much we've lost the desire for a distinctly different life. Most of us would rather be dead than different. - John Drescher, *Mennonite*, 1976

We hear, but do we listen? We hear the Word of God, but very quickly find ourselves lured away by the sounds of this world's voices. We muffle God's clarity because we're too busy with the business and distractions of life.

We Christians often have a regrettable tendency to bring into the church what we practice on the outside, instead of taking outside what God has told us to practice within. - Harris Langford, *Presbyterian Journal*, 1978

And so, our text. Jesus and the first Disciples. Lessons that reflect what I just put in front of you. We are confronted with . . .

THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. LET'S MAKE SURE WE DO.

I. The Significance of John 7:7.

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. (vss. 30-32)

So, why **afraid to ask Him**? How about because they were afraid they were going to hear something they didn't want to hear? And, of course, there was their connection to Jesus. How would that play out in time? I mean, we do recall Peter's denial, don't we? That moment of clarity which associated the disciple with his Lord.

Why don't people love Jesus? He loves them. He loves all humans. And there are those who broadcast it: "Jesus loves you!" Standing by itself, that statement is meaningless. Meaningless, until you connect the significance of John 7:3-7:

So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For not even his brothers believed in him. Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil."

Jesus words to his brothers, ***your time is always here***, sums up the reality for all worldlings and carnal Christians bent on the joys and comfort of this life. Their time is always here - this world - its thinking and desires. But, oh, dear friends, it's those words ***it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil*** that are devastating. And please don't say, "Well, you need to see the positive and good things of this world." I see the positive and good things of God's love for me in Christ and, therein, find true happiness and consolation. But the question is, do you see behind all the facades of this world?

Do you see what Jesus says: "I testify about (the world) that its works are evil."? Do you see why the world hates the church? Do you see what happens when a church finally grows up and understands that it doesn't win anyone by glitz and glamor and nifty programs? The issue is sin and the need of a Savior. Jesus' brothers didn't understand. Let's make sure we do. We say with Luther, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me."

II. The Unimportance of Being Important.

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." (vss. 33-35)

I'm calling this part of the sermon ***the unimportance of being important***. We are a nation of conformists. We are being overwhelmed by those who want everyone to get in lockstep with whatever the thinking of the moment is, regardless of good and bad, right and wrong. If you want a place in life, to be recognized as someone of value and importance, then you must walk with this world's thinking.

Do you remember that moment when the disciples said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." (Lk. 10:17) It was exciting. It was an impressive moment that caused the disciples to feel important. And what was it Jesus said? "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Lk. 10:20)

The disciples didn't understand. Let's make sure we do. As John Drescher said: "We long to be loved so much we've lost the desire for a distinctly different life. Most of us would rather be dead than different."

III. It's a Matter of Service.

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 one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." (vss. 35,36)

I suspect it's a bit easy to think that certain works are more important than others. And maybe some here see what they do on a day-to-day basis as not all that important. But, you see, everything we do as God's people in Christ reflects Christ.

Commentator Harold Wicke wrote:

To be first means to be the last, to be the servant. No service is too lowly, not even meeting the needs of a child. Service means sacrificing your time, your talents, yourself for the sake of others, even when they do not realize 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? (Harold E. Wicke, *Mark, The People's Bible*, Northwestern Publishing House, second printing, 1997, p. 134)

Wicke's next words are chilling: "But it's the complete opposite of how the world looks at it." (Ibid.) And I thought to myself, the daily slaughter of the unborn is powerful testimony to what this world truly is and its understanding of greatness. The "great ones" are those who bravely step into the arena and fight for the life of the unborn! The world, left to itself, has no choice but to hate Christ and His church. And I thought to myself, all we see is the fall of one church after another in this country to this world's thinking and wants.

Harris Langford was right; to repeat: "We Christians often have a regrettable tendency to bring into the church what we practice on the outside, instead of taking outside what God has told us to practice within."

The Scriptures clearly remind us, "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" and this: "while we were sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8,10) They clearly remind us, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." (Rom 7:18,19) The Scriptures clearly remind us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) And they remind us, in spite of our on-going struggle with sin and the fact that we are in a fierce war - those glorious Scriptures remind us, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1)

We have everything in Christ. We are everything in Christ; everything we need to be, if we listen to and grow in the Word of God. Few understand. Very, very few! Let's make sure we do.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott