

# Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

## “CROSS-JOURNEY”

Mark 9:30-37

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### Analysis by Michael Hoy

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 about 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.”

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## DIAGNOSIS: Where Are We Going?

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Did Not Understand*

Where are we going, Jesus? To be sure, this is not the first

time he has spoken words to his disciples about where they are going (cf. 8:31ff.). But the journey is taking a noticeable turn: “through Galilee”—on the home terrain for Jesus and his own, to be sure, but also south. And the words that Jesus speaks to his own add to that southern turn: about betrayal, death, and rising (v. 31). “But they did not understand what he was saying” (v. 32a). Why? Because their own heads were not going in the same direction. Rather than thinking of a destination with death and the grave, their thoughts were just the opposite: how to be great and glorious in life (v. 34). Not unlike ourselves, where there are itineraries at cross-purposes with our Lord’s.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Afraid to Ask***

“... and they were afraid to ask him” (v. 32b). As bad as it is that we go about our daily business with wrong-headed thoughts and actions, our fear shows that we lack the courage for the Lord’s journey. Avoiding the subject is better than facing it head-on. So they drop it, maybe hoping it will go away. But that isn’t really hoping. It’s more like what we do most of the time when we go about our daily business with wrong-headed thoughts and fears in order to avoid the dangerous turf: despair. In fact, we live in a culture of despair, and don’t even know it ...and are afraid to ask.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Silenced at Last—as Last***

“But they were silent” (v. 34). At last, they are caught in the act of what it is that they were arguing about along the way (v. 33). It’s not like he didn’t know (v. 35). And yet, rather than fess up, they are silenced by the question, with all its divine accountability. Silenced at last, also in their arguing; no more “greatness” here to stand the test. In fact, for all that has characterized this life of wrong-headed, fearful being, there is only the judgment that we finish up last, and lost.

## **PROGNOSIS: Will You Take Me with You?**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Servant of All***

And that last and lost place is precisely where our Lord meets us, on our home turf, to change the direction for our good. Not by fearful avoidance, not by heading in the opposite direction, but by taking us through the place of “last of all” as he had described it: being betrayed, killed, and yet rising again. His role is to serve us all by taking our place, in the judgment of divine accountability, on the cross.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trust; Taken into His Arms***

Jesus’ taking a “little child” into his arms is already a foretaste (baptismal) of what we may claim about ourselves already now—even before God—because of Jesus’ claim on last place for our sakes. We are not on this journey alone; and that is precisely what Jesus wanted his own to understand. Instead, we are honored before all vain-glorious ambitions that dominate this world and its thinking. And trusting that One who holds us is more important than all of that the world has to offer, we are not afraid to say, “I’m with Him!”

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Welcoming***

The promise of being with Jesus is open-ended. It always has been, and there’s no need to stop it now. God knows some wrong-headed types tried, but “he will rise again.” And now greatness comes in our taking up the mantle of our Lord’s servant-hood, following in his way, and welcoming the lost and alone. We’ll find some along the way through Galilee or wherever our home turf is. And our itineraries will meet at the cross-purpose of our Lord.