

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

WHEN SPEAKING OF THE DEATH AND RISING OF JESUS, IT IS NECESSARY TO PROCLAIM JESUS' PROMISE

Mark 9:30-37

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

0They 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.

3Then 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."

DIAGNOSIS: We Say, "I'm the Greatest!"

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *All We Do Serves Our Purpose to Be Greater*

When Jesus' disciples did not understand Jesus saying that he would be killed and rise again, it was because Jesus gave no explanation, no reason for dying and rising. If Jesus said he was going to heal the sick, the disciples would understand that because they knew the sick wanted to be healthy and alive again. But why die and rise again? What good would it do anyone? The disciples did not understand why Jesus would die and rise again. They feared the judgment of him saying, "What do you mean you don't understand?" So they did not ask why Jesus was teaching them about his death and rising, or what sense there was dying and rising.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *We Trust the Law*
Not knowing the meaning of Jesus' death and rising, the disciples continued trusting what they always trusted—looking good in the sight of the law (and others). That is what is meant by "they had argued with one another who was the greatest" (v. 34). This trust in the law is not recognized by people. People automatically feel they have to be greater than others ("the law is written on their hearts," Jer. 31:33). They don't know why they feel they have to be greater, they just do. For the law demands us to look good. Also, with people being self-centered (also a cause for the need to be the greatest), they want to be noticed first, before others. Thus, to be noticed first, they have to be greater, the winner, richer, smarter, wealthier, better family, better job, and be busier than others. For if one is better in any of those ways, they feel they have fulfilled the law (though unknowingly). That trust, in being better than others, is hugely strong and cannot be given up. It cannot be given up because that would require the law to no longer exist, which is the same as requiring that God no longer exist.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *To Trust the Law (our greatness) Is to Be Against God*

Trust in the law is to be hostile to God, and to have no love for God (no matter how much a person protests and says, “I believe in God and all that”). “The mind that is set on the flesh [who was the greatest] is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8). To set the mind on the flesh is death—to have no relationship with God at all, which is to become nothing. Our pursuit of being great ends up with us being nothing.

PROGNOSIS: Jesus says, “I’m on a Cross.”

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *On a Cross, Jesus Is God’s Son*

Jesus becomes nothing when he is betrayed and killed. (That is an historical fact. The disciples could not figure out the purpose or reason for it.) Jesus endures being nothing for our sake, so that in him we become everything to God. This we know because three days after Jesus was killed he was raised from the dead! Jesus, in order to be the first of all to be raised, had to be last of all on the cross and the servant of all. Jesus died serving us with his promise of God’s welcome. So when we are nothing in Jesus, we are raised up to be everything to God his Father. So it is not enough to say Jesus died and rose again. We need to also to proclaim the reason why that is good news for us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Are Given Trust in Jesus*

Jesus promises us that when we are last in him, we are first to God (“Whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me,” v. 37). His promise that we have life with God through him creates a new heart in us that trusts him. Now life is in

Jesus—not in how great we are, not in being a winner, not in health or having a great time. Now, even in the midst of sickness, our life is in Jesus and we are fine.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *All We Do Gets To Serve the Least*

Now that we are in Jesus—last with him and first with God—we are free from having to argue amongst ourselves about who is the greatest. No longer do we have to win, beat others, be better than others, smarter than others, faster than others, wealthier than others, or more right than others. We have been freed from that and now get to welcome the least, the child, in Jesus' name (not for our benefit or to be noticed or thanked). We get to be servant of all, caring for the weak, the helpless, the scorned, the sick, the left out, the people who are not the greatest at anything. We welcome those with HIV/AIDS. We welcome the parent who says there is no food for their children today and feed them. We forgive in Jesus' name those who hurt us. We do not cater to the rich and let the poor garner food from dumpsters, but welcome all in Jesus' name. We are servants of all (v. 35).