

Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 9: 30-37

Sept. 20, 2015

My Fellow Redeemed In Christ,

James Says In Our Second Reading: **“Do You Not Know That Friendship With The World Is Enmity With God?”** He Says This Because The Ways Of The World Are Not The Same As The Ways Of God. The Way Of The World Is To Be First, To Be Number One, To Be The Greater Than Other People. This Original Sin Shows Itself Very Early In Life As Children Shout Out: **“Me First, Me First!”** Or As Children...And Yes Even Adults Sometimes....Push And Shove In A Line To Get An Advantage. This Attitude Of Course Is Seen Every Where In Sports As Fans Chant.....**“We’re Number One! We’re Number One!”** This Is Part Of Our Sin Fallen Human Nature. So Then We Should Not Be Surprised When We Hear In Our Gospel Lesson That The Disciples Actually Argued....Yes Argued About.....Who Was The Greatest? So Then Like A Father With A Small Child With A Teachable Moment.....Jesus Had To Take Them Off To The Side, Sit Them Down And Explain To Them That While This Is How The World Works.....This Is Not The Way It Works In His Church.....Instead He Says **“If You Want To Be First, You Must Be Last”**.

I. Oh Yeah...I Can Hear All The Sports Fans In The Puget Sound Chanting, **“We Wanna Be Last, We Wanna Be Last”**.... But...My Dear Brothers And Sisters In Christ...We Must Always Remember That The Ways Of The World Are Not The Ways Of God.

A. And So The First Thing We Have To Examine Is Our Attitude. Because If Our Attitude, Our Thinking Is Wrong.....Our Behavior Will Also Be Wrong. Throughout All Of History Every Civilization, Every Culture Has **“Pecking Order”**. In Begins Already In The Home With The First Born Or With Favorite Children, It Goes Over To School With Popular Kids And Unpopular Kids...Human Beings Are Always Ranking People From High To Low..... Adults Determine This Ranking By Such Things As Money, Education, And Status. At The Top Are The Rich And Powerful.....At The Bottom Are The Weak And Poor. We Often Hear Of Politicians Of All Kinds Abusing Their Office For Their Own Advantage Rather Than Serving The People Who Elected Them. American's Often Complain About Ceo's Of Large Corporations Who Seem To Be More Concerned About Their Own Salary And Benefits Than They Care About The Welfare Of The Average Worker., But Listen.....Someone Who Is Rich And Powerful Can Be A Humble Servant And Someone Who Is Weak And Poor Can Be Self-Centered And Self-Promoting . Jesus Is Not Simply Concerned About How Rich Or Poor, Powerful Or Weak Someone Is. It's The Attitude That Jesus Is Looking At.....What Is Inside A Person. Those Who Want To Be Leaders And Great In His Kingdom Must Have The Right Attitude. A Person Can Want To Be A Pastor For All Of

The Wrong Reasons: Power, Control, Prestige...Or Some Other Reason That Serves His Own Selfish Needs And Boosts His Self-Esteem. Likewise Church Members Can Join Boards And Committees And Do Other Things In The Congregation For Self-Serving Reasons. This Is Why They Get Upset When No One Thanks Them For What They Have Done...And None Of This Is New.....It's Been In The Church Ever Since That Day The Disciples Argued About Who Was The Greatest.....But Jesus Says It Shouldn't Be This Way.

B. In God's Kingdom The **Pecking Order** Is God, Others...And Then Self As Jesus Says: **“If Anyone Would Be First, He Must Be Last Of All And Servant Of All.”** In Order To Make His Point He Took A Child.....Put Him In The Midst Of The Disciples And Held Him. Compared To Adults... Small Children Have No Power. They Are Dependent On Others For Their Basic Needs And Survival. And Jesus Says: **Whoever Receives One Such Child In My Name Receives Me....”** In Modern Day America Serving Children Is Not Always Honored. Being A Mother And Caring For The Children Is Not Nearly As Impressive As Having A Career. . It's Far More Glamorous To Go To Power Lunches Downtown Than To Deal With The Challenges Of Caring For Children. But Even If A Mother Has Another Job.....In God's Eyes It's Not As Important As Taking Care Of Her Children. Jesus' Point Is That Children Are To Be Served Not Because Of What We Get Out Of It.....They Are To Be Served Because They Need And Deserve Love And Care. And That Might Not Look Very Glamorous And Also Involve Some Hardships And Sacrifices. And So It Is With All Of Us In God's Kingdom...His Church. To Be Great In God's Sight Means Being A Humble Servant Caring For The Needs Of Others. And This Too Might Involve Hardship And Sacrifices. But Jesus Is Not Asking Us To Do Anything That He Hasn't Already Done For Us, As He Says: **“The Son Of Man Is Going To Be Delivered Into The Hands Of Men, And They Will Kill Him...”** And Who Is Jesus? God. But He Didn't Look Like God Or Act Like God. He Was Not Rich, Famous Or Glamorous. In Other Words, He Didn't Take Advantage Of Being God. Instead, He Was Humble, Poor, Disrespected, Opposed, Betrayed, Beaten And Finally Killed. Why? To Serve Us....To Restore Our Relationship With God By Dying For Our Sins And To Give Us A Life That Will Never End. Jesus Is The Greatest In The Kingdom Of God Because He Became Last And Servant Of All. And This Is What He Expects Of Us...Asking Us To Do For Others What He Has Already Done For Us.

ii. But Of Course It's Not Easy To Be A Humble Servant In A World Which Tells Us That We Should Always Try To Be Number One. Such Service To Others Might Include Hard Work, Sacrifice, Not Being Understood, Not Being Appreciated And Who Knows? Maybe Even Suffering. Certainly That Was True Of Jesus.. This Is A Very Hard Lesson For Us To Learn.....

A. This Was Certainly True Of The Disciples. At The Beginning Of Our Gospel Lesson We Are Told That Once Jesus Got His Disciples In The House He Taught Them In What Must Have Been Shocking Language About His Humility And Death-----But Also His Resurrection. But They Didn't Get It As

Mark Says: **“But They Did Not Understand The Saying, And Were Afraid To Ask Him.”** Jesus' Suffering And Death Simply Made No Sense. At This Point In Time The Disciples Were Still Thinking Of Jesus In The Worldly Glamorous Terms Of Being A Political And Powerful Military Savior...Throughout History, Well Meaning Christians Have Tried To Blend The Service Of The Church With Worldly Politics And Power.....The Roman Catholic Church Has A Long History Of Doing This....Combining The Church With Politics. In Europe This Mistake Is Seen In State Churches Where Secular Governments Are Involved With The Administration Of The Churches. And The Results Are Always Bad For The Church. For Church And State Are Opposites. The Government Works Through Laws And Coercion...But The Church Works Through The Gospel Of God's Love In Jesus Christ. And Whenever Church And State Are Mixed What Always Happens Is That The Gospel Of Jesus Christ Gets Lost In The Midst Of Political And Social Concerns..As History Has Proven. This Is Why Jesus Explained These Things To His Disciples.... And In The Church We Need To Hear This Over And Over Again.

B. And So This Morning And Every Sunday Jesus Has Called Us Here To This House To Be With Us And To Teach Us. But He Does More Than Teach Us. He Actually Gives Us The Results Of What He Has Done: Peace With God Through The Forgiveness Of Our Sins....And Eternal Life In The Resurrection From The Dead. He Gives Us These Things Through Such Humble And Common Things As Words, Water, And Bread And Wine. In Other Words, Jesus Is Still Serving Us.....That's Why We Call This Service The Divine Service. Every Sunday Morning He Serves With His Word And Sacraments So That When We Leave His House We Too Can Serve Others. This Humble Service To Others Begins In Our * **Families** As Husbands And Wives Humbly Serve Each Other; As Parents Act As Role Models Of Humble Service For Their Children; And As Children Learn To Be Humble Servants In Obedience To Their Parents, Serving Siblings And Those Outside The Family...Because Such Humble Service Does Not Stay In The Home. It Carries Over To * **School** Where Students Can Serve The Weak And The Unpopular Students And Make Them Feel Included. It Spills Over At * **Work** By Doing Those Extra Things That Are Not Required But Are Useful And Helpful To Others. This Humble Service Spills Over To Our * **Friends And Neighbors** As We Go The Extra Mile To Be Helpful And To Get Along With Others In So Far As It Depends On Us. And, Of Course, We Serve Others Here In Our * **Congregation**. It Takes A Life Time To Learn To Be A Humble Servant...And We Never Quite Get It Right. But, Because Jesus Has Served Us We Know That We Have God's ForgivenessAnd That's Why We Keep Trying As He Gives Us Opportunity.

Conclusion Many Years Ago I Read A Story About A Wealthy Woman Who Gave Generously To Support Charities All Around The World. One Of These Charities Was A Leper Colony Overseas. One Day She Decided Go And Visit. While She Was There Touring The Facility She Saw A Christian Nurse Tenderly Treating The Skin Of One Of The Lepers. She Felt Great Admiration For The Nurse....So Much So That

She Told The Nurse That No One Could Pay Her Enough Money To Do What She Was Doing.....And
The Nurse Simply Smiled And Said.... **“Neither Could I”**. And So It Is With All Those Who Want To
Be The Greatest In The Kingdom Of God Where The Question Not About "**What's In It For Me?**"....But
What's In It For The Other Person?"Amen.