

## Proper 24, Year B

October 21, 2018

Mark 10:33-37, 41-45

*[Jesus said to his disciples,] "...the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."*

*James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."*

*When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

Some Bible scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was originally meant to be read aloud in front of an audience.<sup>1</sup> In fact, you can purchase on Amazon a DVD of actor Max McLean's award-winning one-man stage performance of Mark's Gospel.<sup>2</sup> It's only 94 minutes long – and it is riveting!

Now, there are definite advantages to seeing and hearing Mark performed in one sitting – one of them being that you can see how certain themes recur throughout the Gospel in a way that hearing it read in small pieces Sunday after Sunday does not convey. For instance, four Sundays ago, we heard Jesus tell his disciples, "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." And in the very next moment, the disciples are arguing among themselves which of them is the greatest. Whereupon Jesus calls them together and says, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."<sup>3</sup>

So here we are in our Gospel today, only one chapter later in Mark's Gospel, and what do we have? The exact, same sequence of events: Jesus predicts his coming betrayal, death, and resurrection. then James and John ask Jesus that they be recognized as the greatest 2 disciples; and when the other 10 disciples hear about it, they become angry –because each of *them* would like to be recognized as greatest. And then Jesus tells them: "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

The pattern is repeated: 4 Sundays ago and again today, Jesus predicts that he will be betrayed, killed, and rise again; the disciples argue about who is the greatest; and Jesus teaches about the ways of the Kingdom of God, which are the opposite, the inverse, of the ways of the “Gentiles” (the world and **its** values). For followers of Jesus, the first must be last of all and servant of all, for Jesus himself came not to be served, but to serve.

Now it would be easy for you and I to sit back and shake our heads and say, “Those dim-witted disciples! When will they ever learn?” But the fact of the matter is that you and I are Jesus’ *current* disciples, and we are not as different from those original 12 as we might like to think. For despite hearing *countless* times over the years, “It is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,” we followers of Jesus nonetheless are often caught up in the “way of the Gentiles” – the way of the world around us – the mindset of “me first, my group first, my country first.”

And I think there is an understandable reason that we so easily get caught up in “the way of the Gentiles” – the way of the world. Fr. Thomas Keating, in his book *The Human Condition*, states that we human beings have certain core psychological needs for power and control, esteem and affection, and security and survival. When these core needs are not met, or are threatened, especially during our childhood years, we can develop inordinate *attachments* to people, places, and situations that bring us comfort; and *aversions* to people, places, and situations that lead to *discomfort* in the light of how we might have been wounded in one or more of the areas of our core needs. Fr. Keating calls this collection of attachments and aversions our “emotional programs for happiness,” and they are almost always unconscious, exerting control over us without our awareness. In their repeated arguing over who is the greatest, the disciples seem to have had some lack or wounding in their core psychological needs for esteem, power, or control, and their unconscious programs for happiness in these areas are being played out in this repeated pattern of arguing who is greatest and jockeying for power, control, and esteem.

In our present day and time, election day is approaching, and savvy politicians are focusing their attack ads on areas where they can “hook” our emotional programs for happiness – particularly honing in on our core psychological need for safety and survival. Because that core need is so powerful, this has always been an effective political strategy. Lyndon Johnson’s infamous “Daisy Ad”<sup>4</sup> ominously warned that a Barry Goldwater presidency would bring a nuclear holocaust and the end of the world. George H.W. Bush hinted in his Willie Horton ad that Michael Dukakis would set murderers free on the streets of America. Democratic candidates have at times warned senior citizens that Republicans would take away their Social Security. Ted Cruz recently warned that “If Texas elects a Democrat, they’re going to ban barbecue across the state.” In recent years, political ads have hinted that all Muslims are terrorists, and a majority of refugees are murderers

(despite the clear and overwhelming evidence to the contrary). Richard Nixon once said: “People react to fear, not love. They don’t teach that in Sunday school. But it’s true.” And almost a century ago, journalist and scholar H.L. Mencken wrote, “The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.”

My friends, we must realize that when we are being ruled by our unconscious emotional programs for happiness, we are wide open to being manipulated by threats, no matter how unlikely, or irrational, or deceitful, threats to our core psychological needs for power and control, esteem and affection, and security and survival. And like the 12 disciples in Mark’s Gospel, when we are caught up in our emotional programs for happiness, we will not be able to hear Jesus’ clear teachings: teachings on loving our enemies, turning the other cheek, walking the extra mile, seeking to serve rather than be served – and on and on. For our unconscious programs for happiness will see all of these things as threats, and therefore will see Jesus’ teachings as “naïve” and not in touch with the “*real* world.”

But the truth is, my friends, that our *real* selves – our **True** Selves – are not our fearful selves. Our True Selves are who we are in God, in whose image we are created, and to whom we all return when we die. It is our *False* Self, our *wounded* Self, that over-identifies with those things or people that *seem* to be able to protect us and to heal our wounded needs, but which in reality cannot. Our False Self **tries** to meet these needs by its own efforts at self-protection and asserting itself over and against others, whom it sees as competitors for power and control, esteem and affection, security and survival. But if this is how we see the world, how we approach the world, striving by our own attachments and aversions to heal our wounded needs, we will never hear the message of Jesus, or understand the example of his life, let alone his death and resurrection. As Fr. Keating says, all of these efforts of our False Self are ultimately of no avail, for the only true healing comes from the “Divine Therapy” of being steeped in the indwelling Spirit of God.

So when a political ad comes on TV, with the Darth Vader music playing ominously in the background, realize that your unconscious programs for happiness are being intentionally hooked. This is the way of “the Gentiles,” the way of this world, wherein the world’s rulers lord it over others and manipulate us into thinking that only they can protect us from threats to our need for power and control, esteem and affection, and security and safety. My friends, it is not true; it is a lie. Jesus clearly says that this is NOT how his followers should live and act. “... it is not so among you,” he says; “but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” According to the ways of a world in which everyone is trying to secure their own power and control, esteem and affection, and security

and survival – in competition with everyone else – this makes no sense. But as followers of Jesus, we are called to “seek first the kingdom of God,” let go of our programs for happiness, trust the indwelling presence of God to heal the wounded needs of our soul, and serve the world in the name of Christ.

AMEN

- 1 <https://www.csl.edu/resources/gospel-of-mark/>
- 2 <https://www.amazon.com/Marks-Gospel-New-Max-McLean/dp/B003B2XP10>
- 3 Mark 9:30-37 (NRSV)
- 4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daisy\\_\(advertisement\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daisy_(advertisement))