

We're Number 1

9-23-2012

Mark 9: 30-37

30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?"

34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." 36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

I would like to start today with a series of questions. If you know the answer, go ahead and say it.

1. What heavy weight boxing champion used to chant "I am the Greatest" Mohammed Ali
2. What American has won the Tour de France 7 times? Lance Armstrong
3. Who won the Super Bowl last year? New York Giants
4. Who won the World Series last year? St. Louis Cardinals
5. What major league team has made the most appearances in the World Series? New York Yankees @ 40
6. What American swimmer holds the record for the most Olympic medals? Michael Phelps @ 22

Now let's go with the converse to these questions. Who was the worst heavy weight boxer ever? Or, what American lost the Tour de France the most. OK, who lost the Super Bowl last year? New England Patriots? Here's one for you, what NFL team has never appeared in a Super Bowl? Actually, there are four: Cleveland Browns, Detroit Lions, Jacksonville Jaguars, and the Houston Texans. Who lost the World Series last year? Texas Rangers, if anyone cares. Do we care what major league team has never made an appearance in the World Series? In case you do, it's the Washington Nationals and the Seattle Mariners. And last but not least, who cares how many Americans have been in the Olympics and never won any type of medal. And, why don't we care. Is it because we are not sports fans? For some of us that's true, but for the vast majority of us, it's because we have been taught not to worry about who comes in second or third or fourth. For the most part, we have been taught not to care about anything except winning. Have you ever heard the saying, second place is just the first loser? This is a message we teach our children and it's a message we were taught. Win, be the best, come in first, make the highest grade, be first in your class, get the highest paying job, live in the biggest house, drive the most expensive car, have the most toys... I used to teach with a man who coached tennis at the high school in Farmville. His favorite t-shirt to wear to practice read "He who dies with the most toys wins". Isn't that the American way, be first, be number one! Have any of you ever been taught, be second? I've never heard anyone chant we're number two, we're number two. And it's not just here in America, it's worldwide. I don't know of a single nation that strives to be number two. I have never heard of a nation that wanted to have the lowest GNP of any nation in the world, or to have the highest poverty rate of any nation in the world.

With all this number one business, it's absolutely amazing any of us can profess to be Christians. No, really, the gospel is counter-productive to what we teach here in America. Actually, the Gospel is counter-productive to what is taught worldwide.

Do I have your attention? Listen, Matthew 5:5, **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.** When were you ever taught to be meek? How about Matthew 20:16, **So the last will be first, and the first will be last.** Have you ever heard a PE teacher say, OK, I want each of you to line up and let's see who can come in last. And from today's gospel reading, Mark 9: 35, **"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."** None of that sounds very number one to me; be last, serve everyone. In John 13 we have the story of the last supper and in verses 4 & 5 we read, **so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.** ⁵ **After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.** Jesus knows He is about to be betrayed, turned over to the authorities, tried, convicted, and crucified and what is he doing? He is washing the feet of his disciples, serving his followers just before he goes to serve each of us through his death and resurrection. The gospels all teach meekness and service. Isn't that the exact opposite of what we teach worldwide today?

Jesus has had the disciples with him for three years. He has started the trek toward Jerusalem. He is nearing the end of his ministry. Now he is again trying to explain to the disciples what is going to happen to him, how he will die, be raised from the dead and ascend into heaven. They heard bits and pieces of what he had to say, but not enough to really understand.

I guess, they were a lot like us. They were thinking about themselves first. Listen to verses 33 thru 35: **They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."**

The disciples were a lot like you and I. They wanted to be the greatest, each one wanted to be number one. Jesus had to make a point, he had to get their attention. Listen to verses 36 and 37: **He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them,** ³⁷ **"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."** Jesus used a child to teach a lesson. Children in Jesus day were not treated like the children of today. Look at how we treat our children. One of this churches strongest missions is to reach more children. A tremendous effort has been and continues to be put into our Children's worship and Wonder program. It is a fantastic program. Our children are getting a lot from this program. Several weeks ago we even held a special graduation program to welcome two young ladies into sanctuary worship from Worship and Wonder. In the United States, children are protected and educated. They are considered a very special segment of our society. Sometimes we look upon childhood with a romantic view, as a period of simplicity and innocence. So when we read this text, we think that Jesus is talking about embracing innocence, or loving little children, or even talking about living a childlike life.

It is easy to think that Jesus is telling us to be innocent and loving and simple and pure. That was not the case. In Jesus day, children weren't seen as we see them today. Children weren't much better than cattle. Cattle actually had more value than children. We've all heard the old saying; children should be seen and not heard. In Jesus day, they weren't even supposed to be seen. Children were treated almost as non-entities until they were old enough to be productive. So Jesus takes a small child and says **Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.** Start with "one of these." Start with a child. Children were just not important. Like I said, they were almost non-entities. So, when Jesus took that small child and embraced it, he was embracing all the non-important people in the world. He was embracing the sick, the homeless, the demon possessed, the foreigners, the non-Jews. Jesus was welcoming the pagans, the sinners, those of different religions. Jesus was embracing everyone the Jews and the rest of society had turned their backs on.

Our gospel lesson this morning has two distinct messages. First, is to serve. Put others ahead of yourself; serve. And second, who we serve.

Jesus Christ our Lord came to earth as a human to serve. While he was here, he performed miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead, drove out demons, and last but certainly not least, Jesus went to the cross to die for our sins. His greatest act of service was to give his life for each of us. Through belief in Jesus, each of us can have salvation; we each can have eternal life. Has anyone else ever served you as well? That being said, if He is indeed our savior as we confess, then we too must follow suit and serve. As I have been meeting with our Elders and Deacons this year, one of the things I am beginning to emphasize to each group is service. That is what they do, they serve. And they lead the congregation through service. This is called servant leadership. There are six basic tenants of servant leadership.

1. **A real leader has a servant's heart.** Servant leadership is a calling. I am not just talking about the phone call from the nominating committee. I'm talking about the Christian call to serve others.
2. **Servant leaders appreciate the worth of others.** The last thing a servant leader will do is put himself above someone else simply because of his position. He realizes that each person has worth and strives to help everyone see that worth. Each person is important in the kingdom of God. The servant leader embraces the worth of those around him.
3. **They realize they are not above any type of job.** Servant leaders gladly do whatever is needed, from taking out the trash, to serving communion. No job is too great or small. There is dignity in any work done for the Lord.
4. **They don't pursue their own position, honor, or glory.** Servant leaders are all too often amazed when they get that call, who me, I'm not worthy. They don't use their position to gain influence.
5. **Servant leaders look for ways to help others.** As we go through this year, you will find that our elders and deacons are looking for ways to serve this congregation. A perfect example is our Elders trying to set up a phone tree to serve our elderly congregation members. This will be a system to check on each one, daily, particularly those who live alone.
6. **Servant Leaders don't use people; in faith, and by faith we serve them.** Jesus continues to be our greatest example of a servant leader. He never once used a single person for his own personal gain. Yet, He served all he came in contact with.

Whether you are an elder, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, or just a member of this congregation, each of you can serve. Christ didn't say if you are in a leadership position, then serve. He said, **Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.**" It may be as simple as a call to a sick friend, or even a friend who isn't sick. Sometimes just a phone call can lift someone's spirits. God has given each of us gifts. Learn what those gifts are and then use them, use them in service to others. Give it a try; you might just be surprised how simple it can be.