**Mark 9:30-37 (ESV)**

**30**  They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, **31** for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” **32**  But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. **33** And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” **34** But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. **35** And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” **36** And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, **37**  “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

**“A Word of Service”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. How strange it is in our time to hear on the one hand, “No one is better than anybody else.” Yet, in the same token, what we see is something far different. The goal of American Idol is to watch the numbers dwindle, so only one voice remains as the star. A test in school still uncovers students that are at the top of their class. Picking teams has not changed with those last couple of players always being the hardest to choose. The mantra of saying “everyone is the same” just does not work no matter how many times we say it. There will always be someone standing at the head of the line, even when everyone in line is to get the same thing.

The Gospel reading today tells of the better hope we have by faith in Jesus. This text would be especially significant to those Christians living in a Roman culture dominated by competition. This was the kind of glory where the strong survive and the weak end up forgotten about. It is probably why St. Mark focuses more on what happened with the disciples “on the way” to Capernaum than the other Gospel writers. In the course of life, greatness easily takes hold and tempts the baptized. It is a craving that knows nothing of contentment, but only seeks after glory for self. The cure against worshiping works is the spiritual life in what God says and gives by His Son. Only Jesus serves the least with a promising Word to hope in Him as the greatest gift for sinners.

Having just performed a miracle of healing a boy with an unclean spirit, Jesus always made time to be with His disciples. We note as they traveled back to Capernaum, “…He did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” Unlike explaining the parable of the sower and the seed, teaching became more straight forward as Jesus drew closer to the cross. Greater than casting out demons was how God’s Son came to be the sacrifice a “gentle lamb led to the slaughter…” It was not the greatness of Jesus, but His humility that would go the distance to save sinners. He had no need to hide behind strength. This was the hidden mystery of His cross where Jesus proves all things are possible for one who believes.

Such a service by the Savior to die and rise is too great for us. This teaching is foreign to the other things we learn about in life. Our reaction ends up like the disciples, “But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.” I suppose, insecurity is what we share in common as sinners. No one wants to ask questions for fear of embarrassment. Frankly, we would rather look and talk about the miracles. Yet, as baptized disciples of Jesus He is the teacher. Asking questions is the way to get beyond our fears. Since disciple means, “one who learns.” Silence only keeps us apart from the One who is speaking salvation by His Word. As the Psalmist declared, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” The Lord Jesus teaches by way of His cross. Learning from Him no longer means silence for He puts to shame sin, death, and the Devil.

Where the disciples did not ask any questions to what Jesus boasted about in the cross. The Son of God was bold enough to ask a question to a bunch of boastful disciples. “And when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you discussing on the way?’ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.” Once again, Jesus speaks straightforward, but this time it was about the competitive heart of sinful man. As one commentator remarks, “He asks the question to make them face their sin…He did not intervene while they were making fools of themselves but waited for a quiet moment” (Bul’s notes). After the thrill ride of greatness cooled down, Jesus turned their hearts back to Him by His Word. He drowned the old Adam in the waters of their baptism. It was to exchange one sinful glory for another given as a gift.

Jesus brings His service to show the great deception against discipleship. His question of “What were you discussing on the way?” draws attention to the whole life that we live. Do the bigger and better things that make my family great stand in the way of Christ present in our daily life? What receives the greatest attention at church? Is it discussion over God’s Word or do we end up being more social, financial, and holding to other glories no different from the rest of the world? St. James the apostle strikes at the heart, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” These are the desires that greatly suppress the better gift promised for the baptized. The only answer to the Jesus’ question is to confess the answer He already gave. He had told the disciples of His death and resurrection. His desire is to draw us away from deception into the better news of Him as Savior. He is the greater glory that will not go away.

As much as the disciples argued among each other it would never be resolved by the hands of sinners. Jesus calmed their storm by saying, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” Only a few can be number one in this world. Only a few make it big. Only a few are great by the standards of men. However, Christ has room enough for all. Anyone can be first in His kingdom. The trouble is they will be last and a servant of the rest. This becomes a life of repentance and need for forgiveness over a one’s own greatness. To connect this point Jesus takes up a child and says, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” The disciples were more than students, but baptized children needing constant care by God’s love of forgiveness. This in turn is how they were going to love others in the Name of Christ.

By the service of Jesus, God reveals how the least receive the greatest service. When we as the baptized come together before the Word and Sacrament, it is much more than worship. As Lutherans, we call it “The Divine Service.” This is God’s Service of greatness of forgiveness, life, and salvation given to the least. As a child boasts in many things, the truth is that they need everything. To receive a child no longer is about pride or arrogance, but care and compassion. This is what God does for His baptized children. Jesus is not lording it over us, but calling and teaching us. “His words to us in baptism are not rules and regulations, but an invitation to participate in His salvation” (In Christ 244). It is to go the way of the cross just as we receive our very salvation from the cross. In so doing, we are able to pick up the burdens and cares of those among us. The goal is to serve because the Divine Service brings God’s care for all. Only Jesus serves the least with a promising Word to hope in Him as the greatest gift for sinners. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.