

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 30, 2012
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

(Mark 9:30-37)

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."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The great apostle Paul once made the comment that in his preaching he passed on to his congregations some important and valuable truths. Just what were those truths? Did they have to do with family values? Conservation of the environment? Comments on social ills? 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 answers the question. **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.**

That same truth is of first importance for us today.

Theme: Jesus Died and Rose for Us

- 1) Let's not be afraid to ask what this means for us.
- 2) Let's not strive to be the greatest
- 3) Let's serve him as we serve the little children.

Jesus had withdrawn from the crowds of people with his disciples so that he could spend some time teaching them about the one truth which was most important to them – his suffering and death for their sins and his resurrection. **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.**

Jesus was engaging his 12 disciples in some very intense instructions concerning what was going to happen to him. His many miracles had given evidence of his divine nature. Those miracles had fueled the popularity which made it difficult for him to have private teaching time with his disciples. The disciples themselves had gotten caught up in what the future might hold for them as the disciples of a great miracle-worker like Jesus. Jesus needed to redirect their attention to what was most important. So he spoke of himself as the Son of Man to emphasize his human nature. There was no doubt that Jesus was divine but he had become one of them. By speaking of himself as the Son of Man, Jesus is stressing that he has come as the seed of the woman who would crush Satan's head and rescue sinners from his control. The time when Satan would bruise Jesus' heel was drawing near. (cf. Genesis 3:15)

Soon the God-man was going to be handed over to sinful men. He would be killed. He would rise again. The facts seem so simple and straight forward to us that we might be a bit surprised by the statement in our text: **But they (his disciples) did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.**

How can we explain their lack of understanding? Have you ever had the experience of hearing about something new and unusual and being a bit confused? Maybe you felt that way the first time someone talked about some new technology or a new medical procedure. But later after you have had the opportunity to experience the new procedure or technology first hand it all seemed so simple. Well that's the situation the disciples were in . They weren't ready to accept some new ideas – they were so used to their old way of thinking about the promised Savior as a political leader that they just couldn't figure out why Jesus would want to go to Jerusalem to die. They were so stunned by the statement that Jesus was going to die that they immediately tuned out everything Jesus said after that. It's like they didn't even hear him speak about rising from the dead. They were so taken aback by what Jesus said that they didn't know what to think. Yet they were so intent upon clinging to their own way of thinking that they were afraid to ask Jesus for more information. To a large degree their lack of understanding was the result of not wanting to understand.

Don't we do the same when we hesitate to ask about matters that worry us or frighten us? Anger and denial are common reactions to situations which make us fearful. Human nature foolishly believes that there really are times when ignorance is bliss!

It's important for us to ask the questions the disciples refused to ask! Jesus died and rose for us. Let's not be afraid to ask what this means for us. It's an important question because as Paul reminds us the preaching of the cross is often regarded as foolishness or a stumbling block. (1 Cor. 1:23) We can see that quite clearly if we pay any attention at all to popular religious culture of our day.

What is it that concerns many of the religious people in our society today? Well, you'll find all kinds of commentary about politics, about social issues, about the economy and about the environment.

The opening sentence in an article in the Washington Post read: "God is going green." The article went on to point out that "growing school of theological thought leaders are getting out of the pew, marching on the picket line, and becoming specific-issue activists."

"We've seen a transition occur over the last 10 years, particularly in the American evangelical movement," said Joseph Grieboski, founder and chairman of the Institute on Religion and Public Policy. "We've seen entire denominations take positions on things like fracking (*a process which creates fractures in rocks to allow greater access to oil and gas*). As energy becomes a more important priority the religious community is going to feel a greater demand to be engaged in the public discourse about it."¹

A document entitled, "The Evangelical Climate Initiative" has been signed by over 200 prominent pastors and religious leaders and calls on evangelicals to use more renewable energy and but hybrid vehicles.²

Why is there such a concern about the environment among religious groups? They rationalize this on the basis of the fact that God has given human beings the responsibility of taking care of his creation. While this is certainly true – it is also true that God has given his Scriptures to the church to make us wise for salvation. Like Paul it is the responsibility and privilege of pastors to proclaim Christ and him crucified. But many would rather see their congregations become involved in social or political reform and in making this world a better place to live.

Because this is the religious climate in which we live we need to ask: So what does Jesus death and resurrection mean for us? It means first of all that we are sinners. Now our own sin isn't something that we like to hear about, is it. The very mention of sin causes our consciences to make us feel guilty and we begin to squirm. We may even try to deny our guilt or hide it. We may make excuses – "I'd didn't mean it. I didn't know any better." We may try to pass the blame on to someone else. But the fact remains that we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That's why Jesus had to die. He came to make things right with God for us. He came to pay our penalty. Jesus died for us because we are sinners. That's what Jesus' death means for us.

What else does Jesus death and resurrection mean for us? It means that now we have been justified or declared not guilty of our sins. **But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10) For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!** (Romans 5:8-10 NIV84)

Jesus died for us. What does that mean for us? **The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.** (1 John 1:7 NIV84)

Jesus rose for us. What does that mean for us? Since Jesus is alive we have salvation. Sin and guilt no longer has control over us. Even death cannot hang on to us forever. Jesus put it so simply when he said, **"Because I live, you also shall live."** (John 14:19 NIV84) Hebrews 9:14 gives us this answer: **the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, [will] cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!** (NIV84) We might add the thought that our service begins here in time and will continue for all eternity.

Jesus died and rose for us? What does that mean for us? It means that through faith in him we will live to serve him rather than sin for time and for eternity. That's something the disciples at this point just did not understand or accept. They still wanted to live for themselves and so we read that they got into an argument with each other. **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.**

Jesus was well aware of the conversation they had been having while they were walking with Jesus toward Jerusalem. They were talking about who was the greatest among them. They were bickering about whom God loved best. They were trying to figure out who would get the best job in Jesus' kingdom – keep in mind that they are still convinced that Jesus was going to set up an earthly kingdom. But when Jesus asked them to tell him what they had been arguing about – they buttoned their lips. They knew Jesus would not have approved.

The fact of the matter is that God does not play favorites. **There is no difference, 23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24) and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.** (Romans 3:22-24 NIV84) Although the world might look up to certain individuals as being important because of their lofty positions that's not how God sees things. Jesus explains this to his disciples: **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."**

True greatness in God's eyes comes not by deeds which draw attention to themselves but by humble service which is most often not even recognized. Jesus had come to be the servant of all – truly he is the

greatest in the kingdom of God. There are some lessons for us as we consider the action of the disciples and Jesus response to their arguing which of them would be the greatest.

Jesus died and rose for us. Let's not seek to be the greatest. Arguments among Christians only serve to hinder the efforts of the church to demonstrate and proclaim the love of Christ. There ought to be no place for pointing fingers at someone else for their failures or for patting ourselves on the backs for jobs well done. When we remember that Jesus died and rose for all – then we will have every reason to settle our differences, to set aside our arguments, to stop trying to make ourselves look good, and to humbly serve each other and the Lord in all that we do.

That's the lesson Jesus taught when he called a little child and held him in his arms and said: **"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 died and rose for us: **Let's serve him as we serve the little children.** To receive a little child on the basis of Jesus' name or to welcome him in Jesus' name means more than just taking care of the child's physical needs – it includes spiritual care as well – being concerned about the child's eternal welfare.

The Lord Jesus is encouraging us as Christian parents and as members of a Christian congregation to pass the love of Christ on to our children – sharing with them by word and example the love of Christ who died for their sins and rose so they too might live with him.

Let's serve the Lord as we serve his children. You know this might just be one of those situations where we're tempted to button our lips and refuse to ask, "What does Jesus mean by this?" We've got a pretty good idea that it might involve some effort and we're maybe not interested in making any drastic changes. But let's not fall into that trap. Serving the Lord's children means putting their needs ahead of our own. Because parents too have selfish desires and interests this doesn't come naturally or easily. Maybe it's not so hard when the children are young and obviously helpless – but it's another story when they are older and perhaps even bigger and stronger than we are – then we have that tendency to think that now we can enjoy ourselves. So we put our needs and interests ahead of theirs.

Sadly that is often quite obvious when it comes to the spiritual education of our children. Our jobs, our friends, our recreation – all of these may easily take priority over talking with our children about Jesus and his word. Let's ask another difficult question. How can we make Jesus, his word and opportunities to worship him and learn of him a priority which shows itself in our lives as we attend church, Sunday School, Bible study each week as a family and as we set aside time in our daily schedules for reading the Bible and talking about the Sunday School lesson, the sermon, the Scriptures or the Bible study lesson? How often aren't such activities neglected? What reason do we have to deprive our children of the one thing needful? What reason could we possibly have for failing to serve the little children? Jesus died and rose for them and for us.

Jesus died and rose for us – when we understand what that means for us and when we recognize that this is of first importance – there will be changes in our lives. That's something the disciples discovered after Jesus died and rose again. Then they understood everything that Jesus was trying to teach them in our lesson today. Jesus died and rose for us. Let's be willing to ask and accept what this means for us. Let's set aside our desires to be great and let's serve the Lord as we serve his children. Amen.

¹ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/mar/28/churches-step-up-environmental-activism/#ixzz27uBt9TS3>

² Mentioned in the article referenced in footnote #1