

May 20, 2007

A New Preoccupation
Mark 9:29-41

When Jesus gets hold of us we are compelled to look at life with a new set of eyes, and to live differently. The Gospel confronts behaviors and motives that we once found acceptable.

A lot of Christians are content with a quiet, safe spirituality – a private Christianity of sorts. They enjoy the comfort of their own limitations and they resist the challenges the Gospel brings – the challenges that confront their understanding of the Faith, the truths that would shape their daily practices:

- How they treat their loved ones
- How they handle their business affairs
- How they view the church and the world, etc...

And they think that they can just go on living in a kind of denial of what the Gospel calls them to face and confront and change.

However when we refuse to be shaped by the Gospel, as with the disciples, we become inward in our attitudes and actions.

The same could be said for the Church. Many would reduce the mission of the Church to a ministry of protection where its members are made to feel safe from the dangers and solitudes of the world – an institution that informs and wills people with information – which often breeds an ‘us versus them’ attitude.

And sadly, this is what the world often sees in the Church – and in Christians.

From the outset of Jesus' public ministry He spoke of the Kingdom of God where present and natural actions and activities were replaced by a new way – a new ethic – a new existence that could only come from having a relationship of peace with God.

Jesus sort of demonstrates the path of the Cross for us:

In God's Kingdom...

- Self-Interest bows to Servanthood – vs. 35 – *“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”*

The path of the Cross involves the denial of self – the living announcement that our insecurities have been swallowed by the love of Christ on our behalf – that the One who is First became Last and the Greatest became the ‘Least.’

- Indifference is unseated by Compassion – vss. 36-37 – *“...whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me...”*

The path of the Cross also compels us to be involved in the wounds and broken places of the world – in the most personal of ways – it isn't a removed, distant, impersonal thing.

- Pride gives way to Gracious Catholicity – vss. 38-41 – *“...anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”*

The path of the Cross recognizes that God's Grace extends past the walls of denominational and other-than-pure-Gospel boundaries.

Because I belong to Christ I am a new creation and have a new citizenship.

Ephesians 2:19 – “...citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household...”

This means that the power of the Kingdom of God is availed to me on the most personal level. The Gospel liberates me from being measured by the world’s standards:

- What I make
- How I look
- Where I come from
- How safe... make myself

Another way of putting it is that Jesus frees me to live the Cross – to give when it would be natural to take – to sacrifice when I want to protect and preserve – to touch when my instinct is to pull away – to include when my natural fears compel me to exclude – to serve when my inclination is to rule.

The Kingdom of God has unseated the present and natural instincts of the kingdom of this world.

Now this is where the individual Christian and the Mission of the Church dovetail, because essentially what Jesus is saying is that, humanly speaking, the Church’s Mission is made possible through people who have been transformed by God’s Grace.

If you have ever wondered why most problems don’t get resolved in our lives, our churches and our world, it is quite simple. We are preoccupied with ourselves.

But then Jesus comes – and He turns everything on its head. When He calls us to follow Him, He calls us to a different life – a different way.

But all of this is impossible if we don't look in the direction Jesus pointed His disciples in (vs. 31):

- **His Death** – The ultimate act of Sacrificial Love
- **His Resurrection** – The final act that sealed our Hope

‘Who do you live for?’

If I can't settle that I live for Christ then every good action will be suspect, and eventually will end in disappointment, exhaustion or disillusionment.

Each time a Christian remembers that he or she lives for Jesus – and then acts on that – the world begins to change.