

Readings:

Psalm 1

James 3:13-4:3; 7-8a

Mark 9:30-37

Called to Be

“Jesus blessed children and taught adults, we’ve tended to do the opposite.”¹ Jesus spent time with the least and left behind the leaders. Jesus ate with the sinners and challenged the righteous. Today’s gospel is about more than the welcome of a sweet little child – it is about honouring the invisible.

James and Mark bring to light our blind pride and selfishness. We know and for the most part believe that all are creations of God and yet without a doubt there are those in our world that get the short end of the stick. James confronts us by reminding us wisdom is from above and is not found in selfish ambition. Righteousness is sown in peace and yields gentleness and camaraderie rather than conflict and pride.

The connection of these passages makes the lead in for our scripture in Mark even more intriguing. Our story follows the dramatic healing of an epileptic boy (9:14-29). The disciples were unable to cast out the spirit causing illness, and yet Jesus came and cast it out with a prayer. The disciples were conflicted and so Jesus began to teach on faith and prayer, reminding them that he will not be with them forever, that they too must have faith because soon this will be their work. And yet still not wanting to believe or engage or understand Jesus’ prediction of his suffering and death, the disciples allow themselves to get distracted and begin to discuss, perhaps even argue about which one of them is the greatest.

When reading the passage quickly it is actually a little jarring. How possibly could these conversations and events take place together? Jesus has just been healing the sick, and teaching his disciples the ways of faith and love, telling them that he is about to be persecuted to death for his way of living and they are wondering who will get the seat of honor at the next banquet. They are pondering the great things they have done as they walk with one who needs their comfort, who is directing them to care for others. How can they be so blind and unaware?

Jesus had a similar wondering and so brings before them a child saying “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me and *God*.”

¹ Stoffregen. Brian “Sermon Nuggets” textweek.com

For Jesus this child is the image of the invisible ones who get overlooked, the ones who are not worth the time, energy and care. Children in that society would have been worthless, the death of a child could go by without notice or you might see one begging on the street and walk by without a second glance. You might walk by as the disciples did wondering who deserves the next promotion.

The profound irony here is that the one who looks most like the child in this group walking through Galilee is not one of the disciples, it is Jesus himself. In this moment Jesus is the one who is cared for the least, who is most vulnerable, who is the least likely to be held in a place of societal honor.

Whatever you do to the least of these you do this to me.

There is so much to learn from those words. Like the disciples many remain silent when we are confronted with such truth. When Jesus asked them what they were discussing walking along the road did you hear how the disciples responded? Mark says; “but they were silent” Silent because they knew what they were discussing was contrary to every teaching and experience Jesus had ever walked them through.

We would be hard pressed to find a scripture that says you who are wealthy and prideful are closest to God. And yet wealth and pride and honour are what we hold up in our humanity.

Why do we do this? How do we overcome such selfish ambition?

Perhaps we begin by discovering with the disciples what are we afraid to say out loud? Perhaps that is the place where we need to allow Jesus to touch our hearts. Perhaps that is where we need to have our eyes opened to what we do with the least of these and how that includes Jesus, our God, our faith.

I have come to learn that as a church you as a body have chosen to be in the centre of the city. You have chosen to be in a place where perhaps the least of these are not hard to find. Perhaps they are so easy to see that they are almost invisible. You have opened your hearts and doors graciously to give to those in need. I know by your actions and your history these words are not new and you have sought to live them, but is there more?

Times have changed, new resources are being offered while others are being cut. Some are asking should we be giving out bags of food? Others are asking what else do we give?

So it is time to ask who are we called to be today in this new time and place? As we hear Jesus say ‘come and see’ where is he taking us? What is it that we are not seeing? What is it we are afraid to say? Who are we being called to be? I am excited about engaging in

the study “Hungry for Justice” next month because I think it will help us discover some of those answers.

At Don Mossop’s memorial service on Friday Earl a member of the congregation at NLUC stood up and challenged us all to offer one anonymous random act of kindness this week. See one of the things that often happens when someone dies is we discover how they lived. It was a gift this week to open our eyes and see Don’s life. Many of us in the room could tell story after story of his generosity. Robin talked of days he would walk out of the office to discover his car washed. Don Blackadaar shared a story of coming home to his leaves all raked, others had their lawns mowed, or driveways weeded or even received a much needed new car. I was able to pay for my first semester of my master’s degree. Always without any desire for return usually at least an attempt to be anonymous. See Don would see the invisible and do it. He was one of our most dedicated support workers when we organized dinners for first united, and he is held in high honour for the resources he offered to the harvest project. He heard Jesus’ call to the least of these, and he recognized them as new people every day.

What do we do with the least of these? Who are the invisibles that you encounter every day?

- Is it the girl who gives you your morning coffee at Tim Hortons?
- Is it the single mom who struggles to make dinner for the kids after coming home from work?
- Is it the person who stands in line just to get a meal every day?
- Is it the friend who can no longer make it to church because they just don’t have the strength?
- Is it the man who works 100 hours a week and never has the time to get his car washed?
- Or the woman who just can’t get over the illness of her son?

Who is it that we encounter in our lives that we no longer see? I actually believe we are all members of the least of these when we do not experience love. We are all members of the family of God blessed to bless others, there shouldn’t even be a least of these.

So, knowing that who are we called to be? The love and grace of God to all we see and even to those we don’t.

So maybe it is appropriate and maybe it’s not for me to continue to carry the ‘pay it forward’ kind of challenge to us here at Squamish United, but I’m going it anyway. This week I want challenge each one of us to offer an anonymous random act of kindness – but I want to add one more suggestion I want us to do it for someone in our life that perhaps has been invisible, or we have treated as such and our eyes have been opened to see them as a child of God.

I think as we do this we may begin to see 'who we are called to be.'

Let us pray.