

***MARK 9:30-37, 2015***

<sup>30</sup>] Jesus and His disciples] They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; <sup>31</sup>for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." <sup>32</sup>But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

<sup>33</sup>Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" <sup>34</sup>But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup>He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." <sup>36</sup>Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me

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When I read this gospel lesson for the first time this week I was quite surprised and a little frustrated. It begins with the same story we had in our lesson last week, the prediction of Jesus' passion.

I immediately thought how am I going to preach on the same story as last week and come up with something different to say?

So I went back to last week's gospel lesson to see how the stories differ.

You remember that last week just before Jesus tells the disciples what is going to happen, Peter makes the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus' prediction does not match the expectations Peter has for the coming of the Messiah and they get into a bit of a disagreement.

Then Jesus teaches them the lesson on being first and last, and that those who want to follow him must take up their cross just as he will do in his fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy about his coming.

This week is different in that Jesus is now traveling with only the twelve and,

since the first time he tries to tell them what is coming went so well, he has to repeat it to get it across to them.

He takes a different approach.

He told them the first time simply that the Son of Man would **MUST** undergo great suffering, be rejected and killed, and then after three days rise again.

This time he throws a little twist into it by adding a little more information.

He tells them that he is to be betrayed into human hands, be killed and after three days will rise again.

You know the story about this betrayal. You know exactly what Jesus is talking about so this makes sense to you.

But the disciples are only going to get it looking back at this moment in their time with Jesus after all these things have come to pass.

What is interesting here is the difference in the responses of the disciples.

The first time Peter was bold and confronted, even rebukes Jesus. This time,

The disciples are afraid and the only conversation that takes place afterwards is an argument about which one of them is the greatest.

They are worried about positioning themselves for what ever is to come after Jesus is gone.

All of a sudden this is all about power and being on top.

You see the disciples are now afraid,

And how do they respond?--by worrying about themselves.

And so, Jesus teaches them a little lesson again about being on top.

The issue here becomes this battle between fear and faith.

This is not the only time in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus has to deal with fear.

Back in Chapter 4 after Jesus calmed the storm he asked the disciples,

“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

When Jairus comes to him asking Jesus to heal his daughter and shortly after that Jairus’ friends come to tell him not to bother the teacher she has already died. Jesus interrupts what is going on by simply telling Jairus,

“Do not fear, only believe.”

During Jesus’ trial Peter denies even knowing Him out of fear, the disciples hide out after Jesus’ crucifixion out of fear,

Doubt may be the opposite of faith but it is fear is the enemy of faith.

It is fear that paralyzes, distorts one’s view of reality and hope, and drives one to despair.

Fear drives out faith.

The disciples are afraid, so afraid they can’t even ask Jesus what in the world he is talking about.

What kind of conversation might they have been able to have if only they were not afraid?

What kind of questions could they have asked?

Jesus, I am afraid! Will we be killed also? What is to become of us?

Where does that leave us then?

Jesus, you are the Messiah. If you are God how can it be that you could be killed by humans?

Who are these people who will treat you this way? How could they?

We don't understand. What does this mean?

You know what fear is. You have experienced it, we all have.

We especially fear those things we have no control over.

There were two things that I was afraid of here at All Saints this year alone.

The first thing was moving forward with our personnel team from the first of the year and the many other things we are doing to implement our new four year plan.

I could have allowed fear to have control at many stages along the way as your personnel team could have.

But it was our continually talking about our fears and our faith that God had called us to this,

and that faith driving out fear that kept us moving forward to make God's vision a reality here.

The second was taking on the conversation we have had this year about same gender weddings,

and how that could instill fear, drive out faith and then compromise our commitment to our four year ministry plan that we committed ourselves to last fall.

Part of it was a fear of failure.

Part of it is a fear of hurting those whose lives would be affected by carrying out that ministry plan; particularly Susan since she is now here,

and in failing seeing her dreams crumble along with ours and her life take unexpected turns that would make it difficult for her to understand God's calling, and to sustain herself.

There is a lot at stake.

Since I have brought all that up on the day of her installation she is probably beginning to tremble in fear right about now,

but these are the realities of life and faith, and this is exactly what we see in our Gospel lesson.

Another example is something that happened on Friday.

Liz got a phone call from a man who needed assistance and felt like he had been treated unfairly and wanted to talk to me. He was angry and threatened to come here today and disrupt our service if I didn't call him back.

My initial response was rooted in fear of what could happen if I didn't call him back, and then the possibilities of what could happen if I did call him.

I was afraid that I might not be as pastoral as I should given this man's predisposition.

Do I or don't I?

I did call him of course and our conversation went well and we reached some level of understanding about the situation.

But what if I had let my fear paralyze me and distort my sense of reality? What if I hadn't made that call?

We aren't sure what would have happened but the possibilities would have created that much more fear, paralysis and distortion of the possibilities life held.

There would have been no understanding, only anger.

The disciples did not understand and were afraid to ask Jesus what He meant.

Their response was to argue about which of them was the greatest, and they were embarrassed.

Just like for you, there have been many things to fear along the way in my life.

In your bulletin this week you will find a place where I have asked the question,

“What one fear are you living with today?”

Take a moment to reflect on where you are, what is going on in your life and name just one fear you have today.

It could be relational, financial, about one of your children.

That fear could be about your job, health, why what you are doing or why the ways you are doing things don't work like they used to.

It could be about what is going on in the world today, the political arena in our country,

the Middle East and the refugee situation.

It could be about the church or about your faith. Is it strong enough to see you through?

There are plenty of things to sit around and worry about these days.

Write down just one.

But after you have named that one fear you have, you notice there is another question to answer in your bulletin.

What faithful action might you take this week that will open your heart?

Envision that—opening your heart.

Hearts are not opened by fear, they are opened by faith.

The question really gets at stepping out in faith.

Now there is some argument between which comes first faith or stepping out, but however you experience that works for me and it may not be the same every time.

It may be that your faith will drive you to action while at other times it may be taking a courageous step that builds and strengthens the faith you have,

the faith that fear paralyzed

Your vision of the future, your vision of life and your world view is much different when looking through the eyes of faith rather than fear.

Our faith drove us to take the action of extending the Youth and Family Ministry position to Susan,

and her faith made her step out and accept it.

God will bless those decisions.

My faith called me to return that phone call so that the man who was upset and I could find some understanding about what had happened.

Jesus' response to your fears and anxieties is an invitation, not to faith as an intellectual assent as if that would prevent fear, but rather to

- faith as movement,
- faith that is courageous and takes the risk to step forward, no matter how small that step might be, and in spite of doubt and fear,

- faith as doing even the smallest thing in the hope and trust of God's promises.

Look at what follows the disciple's fear.

Jesus overturns the disciple's assumptions about power and security and invites them to imagine the abundant life coming not through gathering power

- but through displaying vulnerability,
- not through accomplishments but through service,
- and not by collecting powerful friends but by welcoming children.

Fear blinds you to God's action in and through you.

Faith overcomes fear and sends you to serve, and welcome and in your service and welcome of others you serve and welcome your Lord, and the one who sent Him.