

Mark 9:30-37. ³⁰ 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."

Rejoice in the simple truths of the gospel!

1. Learn of Jesus.

2. Learn of Jesus' love for all.

A child was placed among them and there was a welcome shift in perspective. Men who had been fighting about worldly honor and greatness silently listened as Jesus reminded them of what was truly important. Simply sharing the message of salvation and the love of Jesus with people, sometimes the littlest of people, was what Jesus was calling his disciples to do. There were to contemplate the simple message of the gospel, rejoice in its saving power, and share this message and the love of Christ with all people, great and small. It was not going to be glamorous work, but it was Jesus was calling his disciples to do.

A child was placed in front of them, wrapped in the arms of Jesus, and suddenly everything became a little bit clearer. Mark records for us these words, ***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."***

This past Thursday the LORD blessed us with one of those precious moments of perspective. On Thursday night, we were able to celebrate the work of sharing the love of Jesus at Little Lambs Learning Center, as we held a Birthday Party for Little Lambs in honor of our 1st complete year of operation. At this event the children from the center assembled on a stage in front of grown men and women and those children reminded us all of the very joy that Jesus has called us to and the very mission that we have been called to carry out. We are to rejoice in this simple truths of the Gospel. Jesus loves us. Jesus died for us. Jesus rose again to give us eternal life.

To listen as the children sang songs about their Savior, including the always popular "Jesus Loves Me"; to hear them so simply and joyfully praise their God was a

refreshing reminder for all of us. We can easily get distracted from this simple message and the simple task to live and share this love of Jesus. We can get caught up in the complexities of life. We get distracted by our personal needs and wants and feelings, our faith may even be effected. We want life to work better in our favor, we want our needs met, and so it may even get to the point where we sometimes we overlook the simple teachings of the bible and we become so very enamored with what we might label as more practical teachings. People churn out books touting biblical insight and enlightenment and they are often stamped with titles of greatness like, "Your Best Life Now!" "You Can, You Will." "It's Your Time". People search the scriptures for secret codes to personal success, financial gain, and other worldly advantages. And even if we don't snatch up those books, even if there are some very practical and helpful teachings that the LORD gives to us in his word there is this danger that we slide the emphasis of our faith away from Christ and onto personal gain. Our attitude might be, "How can I make my faith work for me?" Reading our Bibles, even serving our LORD, ever so slightly becomes more about finding a way to brighten our fortunes or polishing our reputation than it does about worshipping and praising our LORD and Savior.

In our lesson for today, the disciples too had begun turn their following of Jesus into a self-serving enterprise. The miracles had brought quiet a gathering to Jesus and more and more people were coming. Jesus had fed 5,000 and then 4,000 more. He had healed the sick and cast out demons. The crowds were getting bigger. People were not only recognizing Jesus and praising him, but more and more people were recognizing Jesus' disciples and praising them and coming to the disciples looking for healing and for help. But all the while Jesus was trying to keep his disciples focused, especially the Twelve.

Several times Jesus predicted his death. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things. Even when Peter rebuked him for saying this, Jesus chastised Peter and used this incident as a teaching moment for his disciples. Jesus had come to live and die and rise again. This was his purpose. This was the simple message that Jesus was giving to the disciples to share. They were to rejoice in the simple truths of the gospel. Jesus came to live and die and rise again to give eternal life.

After driving a demon out of a boy, Jesus took his twelve disciples on a journey through Galilee and he was careful to keep this trip a bit more private than his past journeys through this area. His intention in taking such a discreet path was so that he could spend more time with his disciples teaching them in relative peace and quiet. His time on earth was growing short and so the important topic of his teaching was once again turned to the simple truths of his suffering death and resurrection. He led them away from the crowds and told 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.***"

Again these are truths with which we are very familiar. This is basic Christianity for us. But we are told that the disciples did not understand, nor did they take time to ask questions about this teaching because, "***they were afraid to ask him about it.***" We are also told that the disciples, instead of discussing what Jesus could have meant, with regards to his suffering and death chose to spend their time on something else.

How often, don't we pass over the simple joys of the gospel with similar indifference? We may understand what this all means that Jesus would suffer and die and rise again - because we have the benefit of the entirety of Scripture and the blessing of hindsight that the disciples were not privy to - but still, we pass over the simple truths of the gospel and at times we brush them aside like the disciples seemed to do. Not because of a lack of understanding, but we assume that we have better things to talk about.

Jesus takes his twelve disciples on this quiet path, he takes them away from the distractions, and gives them this simple truth and yet they still seem to be distracted from thinking about these important truths. Jesus tells them that he is going to be betrayed, handed over to hands of men and be killed, and he also reveals this fascinating and extraordinary truth that he would be raised from the dead! And yet how much discussion time is used by the disciples in talking about the essentials of the gospel of salvation. Little or none. Instead, of talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus we are told that they *were afraid to ask him about it*.

Is it possible that we too get into the same kind of habits? We are afraid to ask him about it. Instead of taking time to marvel in the mysteries of the gospel. Instead of taking time to dig into God's Word about his death and resurrection we search for something else, anything else to talk about. We should know this, and so with a callous indifference we run through the Sunday School truths, yes he lived and died and rose again. Yes, yes, but let's get it on with it!

But maybe, just maybe we should spend some more time on those simple truths. Maybe, just maybe, it is okay to marvel in the mysteries of God's salvation. Of course it is! This is what Jesus wanted his disciples to do! This is what Jesus wants us to do too! This is the message that his disciples of all time are to carry with them out into the world. This was the message of his love! This was the extraordinary gospel that they we are not to treat as ordinary and therefore boring, but rather we are to continually discuss, to dissect, to marvel at and wonder about, and drink in and eat up the beauties of the gospel. Jesus came to live and die and rise again for you and me.

There is so much there for us to consider in these simple truths! There are countless questions to ponder, to ask God in prayer, to wrestle with in our thoughts and meditations. To ask God why? Why would you do this for me? Why would you send your Son into this world to suffer for my sins, to live the perfect life I could not? Even when the question is answered with a simple, Jesus loves me this I know. Even when the question is answered with the single word grace; even when the answer is so simple, isn't it still so very much worth our time to consider this wonderful answer. Isn't it a worthwhile and beautiful exercise to stop and smell the gospel roses and consider these elementary and fundamental truths: Jesus loves me. Jesus died for me. Jesus rose again. He does this to forgive my sins. He does this to give me his righteousness, his perfection, and give me the gift of heaven. These simple truths of the gospel are there for us to go back to time and time again. He wants us to take this quiet path of contemplation. He wants us to ponder anew what the almighty and merciful Savior came to do. But often

we get distracted. We run over the message of salvation with curt brevity because we hold onto this misleading expectation we should know this already and should move on to other topics or teachings, or focus on more practical things.

The disciples decided not to press Jesus on the important issue of his suffering and death and instead they argued among themselves about who was the greatest among them. On that path of quiet contemplation that Jesus had carved out for them, they filled their time with bickering. Jesus was aware of their bickering. Jesus was aware of their unhealthy distraction. He knew of their lack of understanding and their lack of focus. And so when their journey took a stop at Capernaum, Jesus asked them, ***“What were you arguing about on the road?”*** The disciples kept quiet, no doubt, embarrassed by their needless and selfish discussion; and they stood silent before Jesus. And so Jesus decided it was time for them to have a talk. This time Jesus decided that he would give his disciples some food for thought in the form of a wise saying and an then a living breathing visual aid as he instructed them. 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.”***

A child was placed in front of them and there was a welcome shift in perspective. Even in our carrying out of the mission and ministry at little lambs. In carrying out the complexities of running a center, and operating a congregation, we may easily distracted. We might busy ourselves with the business end of running a preschool or running a church. The meetings and the situations that need to be handled, the budgets that need to be balanced, the expenses that need to be monitored, the income and the support that is to be raised. And even if you are not directly involved such meetings we must avoid the prideful distraction that this effort is somehow a self-serving enterprise that leads people in the community to recognize as such wonderful people. That is not our goal. Our goal, our mission as God’s children, as disciples of our Savior, is that we simply share the love of Jesus and the message of his gospel. Our efforts as a congregation, and in operating our center, and our faith in general, are not to be some sort of self-serving enterprise, but these are ways that we gladly and joyfully serve our LORD and serve our neighbor, as our hearts are filled with thankfulness to our God and Savior.

This past Thursday a number of little children were placed before us and there was a welcome shift in or refreshment of perspective. We are to share the love of Jesus, and as we do that we are to serve our God with the same kind of love and humility of Christ Jesus. We are be the servant of all. We are to welcome great and small in the name of Jesus, by sharing them with the wonderful simple truths of salvation through Christ Jesus. We are to rejoice in this simplicity of the gospel. We are to learn of Jesus. We are to learn of Jesus’ love for all. Jesus loves you. He lived for you. He died for you. And he rose again to give you eternal life. May we always make time to meditate on these simple and wonderful truths! May we always take time to stop and smell the gospel roses in all their greatness! Amen.