

On The Way

We have just crossed over the halfway point in Mark's gospel.

That halfway point is reached as Jesus asks his disciples who he is; and while they get the name right, they completely miss the meaning.

The first half of Mark's gospel is constantly punctuated with the fast paced word: "immediately."

"Immediately" he goes from here to there.

"Immediately" he heals.

"Immediately" he responds.

Today, Mark leaves behind the breathtaking pace that defines the first half of his story; now he slows down --- now, the theme from this point on isn't one word, it's three words: "on the way."

"On the way" to Jerusalem.

"On the way" to Golgotha."

And yes, "on the way" to the resurrection.

It is now, "on the way," that we see a shift in how Jesus relates to the twelve.

Up til this point, we have seen a fair amount of exasperation, impatience, even amazement, by Jesus, at the slowness of the twelve to get what God's reign looks like.

But beginning today, we begin to see with Jesus a patient understanding; a willingness to sit and talk and explain in exacting detail who he is and who he calls us to become.

As they are on the way, the disciples do then what we so often do now: they argue over who is number one.

And yet, rather than scold them, as he scolded them about not understanding about the bread, as he scolded them about their truncated certainties of what the messiah is like; instead of scolding them, today, with us, he has them sit down.

He sits down too.

And he explains.

Simply.

Calmly.

Patiently.

Leadership means service.

Importance is defined as helping out.

Then he does something very radical indeed.

He calls over a young child and puts the child right in the center of them.

One of the mistakes we modern Christians make is to assume that what Jesus says and does in his culture of 2000 years ago means exactly the same thing in our entirely different culture all these years later.

Today we for the most part adore children.

Just lean over to any grandparent who might be sitting next to you – or who *is* you, and ask what they think of their grandbaby!

We today think of children as innocent, naive, unblemished, sweet and lovely things.

At least that's the grandparents prerogative.

But in first century Israel, t'wasn't that way at all.

Children then were socially inconsequential.

They had no social standing, no power.

They were expected to work, to obey, to be grateful for whatever sustenance came their way.

So when Jesus puts that child in the midst of the twelve, he's not telling them to be sweet and innocent and naive and adorable.

More likely, he's telling them to be *inconsequential*.

Now, I hope you gasp at that.

I hope you hear such a thing and think immediately that either Fr. David has it wrong or Jesus is off his rocker.

Because, and I don't need to tell you this, you know it to your bones, being of consequence is the entire lifeblood of our entire modern culture.

We teach, it seems, more about self-esteem to our kids than math or science or social studies combined!

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We are encouraged everywhere we turn to become people of consequence.

To matter.

To excel.

And here comes Jesus, telling them, telling us, to think again.

Now, let's be clear about this.

Too many people over the years hear the call of Jesus to become inconsequential and understand that to mean that they should remain in abusive relationships; or allow addicts to control their lives or permit other people to be cruel or manipulative toward them or others.

This is not the truth Jesus is driving at.

If you're in a relationship like that, get out.

If an addict is running your life, kick her out!

What Jesus is driving at has nothing to do with masochism or playing the victim in a dysfunctional relationship; it has to do with giving birth to a new kind of life.

By setting the inconsequential child before us, and identifying that child not only with himself, but with God, Jesus is leading us into a new way to encounter each other, a new way to encounter our Monday through Saturday lives.

It is a life, as Meister Eckhart likes to say, that has much to do with subtraction.

Subtracting our need to be seen as the most important person in the room.

Subtracting our need to be in charge, in control, in command.

Subtracting our compulsion to achieve security and safety.

As we subtract these things; as we surrender that which the advertisers claim to be the highest consequence, but which are in fact, according to God, nothing more than dross, something begins to happen.

The contentment that eludes us as we chase after security – when we let go of the chase – that contentment suddenly comes to live in our homes.

The peace that we want so dearly to come from controlling others, finally does arrive, in the letting go of control.

The joy that seems to be all tied up with money in the bank, a house or a new car; that joy invades our lives in a way more profound and lasting than any think possible, when money and house and car cease to be the focus of our lives.

G.K. Chesterton once said that paradox is the truth standing on its head in order to get our attention.

Paradox is the truth standing on its head in order to get our attention.

And so Mary is both virgin and mother.

Jesus is both human and divine.

And the gateway to heaven opens wide, right here, in downtown Palama.

It is paradox for Jesus to compare almighty God to an inconsequential child.

It is paradox that in letting go we receive.

It is paradox that to live, we first must die.

Don't ask for a rational explanation – I don't have one.

All we can bring to this strange God is faith.

Yet through faith, you shall discover that by becoming inconsequential, you become truly consequential.

By becoming last, you become first in the eyes, and at the banquet, of God.

By serving all, we suddenly find ourselves kneeling next to God, who kneels before us; inviting us to follow the example of the divine.

Today, Jesus moves gently to break us out of our either/or world; a world in which one is either a winner or a loser.

He invites us instead to come along on a far richer journey, one of depth and true consequence: this is the journey of discipleship, so come along, come along, as we travel together on the way.

+amen

