

Leadership – Being the Least

VBC

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Mark 9:30-37

Series: Mark #13

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“The Kind of Leadership the World Hungers For”

INTRO

Living on the eastside – we often took our Airedale, Spencer, to the puppy park

- A nice place where folk bring their dogs to romp
 - Basically – let them burn a lot of energy so the owners can go home and not be bothered – because the dog sleeps the rest of the day
- It is an interesting place to watch how quickly dogs seek to establish themselves
 - In the case of Spencer – this seems to be especially important to him
 - For reasons I am not sure – perhaps because of insecurity, lack of attention by his parents in his initial weeks – he is obsessed with getting this pecking order determined – Who is the alpha dog in this park?
 - And because this sermon is G-rated – I’ll just leave it at that

In the Jesus story in Mark – the disciples were often in their own sort of puppy park

- Wrestling with the same question (Perhaps some of us are as well)
- And like a sore that seemed to fester whenever certain conditions arose
- This issue would arise – especially when Jesus talked about His impending death – read 9:30-32

Jesus was preparing His followers

- But they were off page – vs.32 – they did not understand and were afraid to ask
 - Afraid of what they would hear perhaps?
 - Afraid for Jesus?
 - Afraid of losing Him?

- Maybe they were simply afraid to ask because they did not want to look stupid amongst their peers
- Jesus gives His announcement – and they probably nodded heads like my seminary students – they appear to understand – but they don't

What they may have understood was that things were going to become unpredictable – UNCERTAIN

- If a new kingdom is inaugurated, will I have rank?
- If Jesus leaves – who will lead?

It led to some spirited discussion and response – vss.33-34

- Who is the prominent one amongst us?
- Who is the king ding – the alpha dog?

I wonder what the conversation sounded like

- But I'm the oldest
- Hey, remember, I was invited to be with Jesus when He healed Jairus' daughter
- Excuse me, I'm the one who knows the tax laws – who has the connections

It's not surprising – they lived in an age that paid lots of attention to position and privilege

- Masters ruling slaves – men dominating women – powerful kingdoms oppressing weaker ones – the rich ruling the poor

- It was only natural to be consumed with issues of power, promotion, privilege

He would again announce His impending suffering – v.10:34

- and they again would argue over who would sit closest to Jesus in glory (10:37)

- It was ingrained in them
- Even their religion taught this
 - Judaism (as found in Rabbinic writings) frequently commented on the seating order in paradise

Not that we are shocked – we are all hard wired the same way

- We all want to know where we stand in the order of things
- It starts in grade school – on the playground
 - and moves on to the corporate office
 - Where will our office be? What floor are we on? How close are we to the CEO's office?

Illustration – Frito-Lay – every week announced who the top dog was – and who was in the dog house

Illustration – Colson reflecting on his years in the White House – talks about the obsession many on the President's staff had with power

- Once on a flight , Al Haig and Ron Ziegler, aides to Nixon, actually had advanced teams measure their sleeping accommodations so that their beds would be equidistant from the President's – so that no one could say they had the edge

The desire for power can be more addictive than drugs – more intoxicating than alcohol

This sizing up happens all too easily in our professions —

- So how many do you employ? What is your stock selling at?
- It happens everywhere – parties, class reunions, family reunions, company dinners

- Even in ministry
 - Go to a pastors' convention – and we start sizing up – sniffing – sorting out who the top dogs are
 - So how big is your church? What is your budget?
 - How many services?
 - How many are on your staff? Where did you attend seminary? What degree did you earn?

Often we are checking each other out – strutting and clucking – figuring out the pecking order

It can be both overt and subtle

- Paul Tournier, psychiatrist – “We are moved without even knowing it by an imperious will to power which brooks no obstacles”
- We maneuver to make sure our voice is represented on a committee

Jesus was not impressed

- Vs.35 – Jesus called a time-out – and sat down with His team
- It was time to get some things straight in the puppy park – those in His kingdom need to understand the rules of rank and privilege
 - the dynamics of upward mobility – the nature of importance in this new realm

If anyone aspires to be first...

- It's not that Jesus has anything against greatness – He wants us to be great
 - He would wish all of us would seek to rise above our times and our circumstances to change, if only just a little, the direction of the human tide
 - To press on to lay hold of why He has laid hold of us
 - Ambitious can be a good word

It's just that He *redefined* greatness – GREATNESS AS DEFINED IN HIS KINGDOM

1 - GREATNESS IS RISING DOWNWARD

- If you want to be first (the one leading, the one prominent, the first in line – painting the future, showing the way – becoming great) – you must be the VERY LAST – the last of all

The problem of course – everything in our competitive and ambitious world militates against this

- Everyone knows —
 - to be great IS to get to the top
 - to become the state champions
 - to become head of the corporation – be the final survivor on the island
 - to become the apprentice hired by Donald Trump

But these are gauges that don't tell the whole story

- They can buy happiness, can attract attention, can reflect a certain success
- BUT THEY ARE ILLUSIONS OF GREATNESS

This is what Jesus declares —

2 - GREATNESS IS DESCENDING NOT ASCENDING

- Descending to be the last of everyone, everything – least of all, lowest, insignificant – willing to have no authority, privilege
- Taking the lowest place at the banquet – self demotion vs self-promotion

UP, IN GOD'S DICTIONARY, IS ALWAYS DOWN

3 - GREATNESS IS SERVING NOT BEING SERVED

- Doing the work of a slave – positioning ourselves under to fulfill the needs of others
- It is very clear – this is what God is impressed with

With one statement – Jesus turned their thinking (and much of ours) upside down

- Turned the pecking order inside out
 - They were interested in who the power brokers were
 - He was interested in the power broken
 - They were thinking greatness is a matter of upward mobility
 - Jesus defined greatness as downward mobility

Why?

- God knows that if we pursue greatness according to this kingdom
 - success and position apart from servanthood – our lives become terribly imbalanced

We end up...

- developing a sense of superiority – aloofness
- using people as tools
- assuming the rules are made for others
- assuming the end justifies the means

In our striving to climb up – we may become completely unaware of how LOW we may actually be going

SELF PROMOTION ALWAYS LEADS TO SELF-DESTRUCTION

To drive home His point – Jesus closed with a visual – vss.36-37

- But what did this mean?

You want greatness? *This* is greatness

A- Investing ultimately in people – not things

- Am I spending all of my life investing in products, buildings, endeavors that will corrode over time – or am I investing in lives that will endure throughout eternity?

B- Greatness is investing in the future (who embodies this more than kids)

C- Reaching out to the seemingly insignificant – the small and powerless – those who have no credits, no clout, no claims – to INCLUDE – EMBRACE – that's greatness

D- Giving out to those who can't give back

- Who don't know your name or position – and don't really care – THAT'S GREATNESS

E- Focusing where God is focusing – identifying with those who Jesus identifies with – that's greatness

F- Ultimately – becoming like Christ

- Becoming a servant of all – becoming the least in order to win the most –
THAT'S GREATNESS

Conclusion --

Let me ask this morning --

- Are you caught up in this worldly pursuit of greatness
 - trapped in the tyranny of comparing yourself
 - establishing yourself – positioning yourself to be first
 - either at the office – or in the marriage – or wherever?

Jesus is freeing us from this

- Freeing us from the worry regarding status
- The tyranny of posturing, positioning, comparing

Ultimately – it matters not what the world considers as great

- All that matters is that we are great in God's sight
- And that means we are willing to be a servant