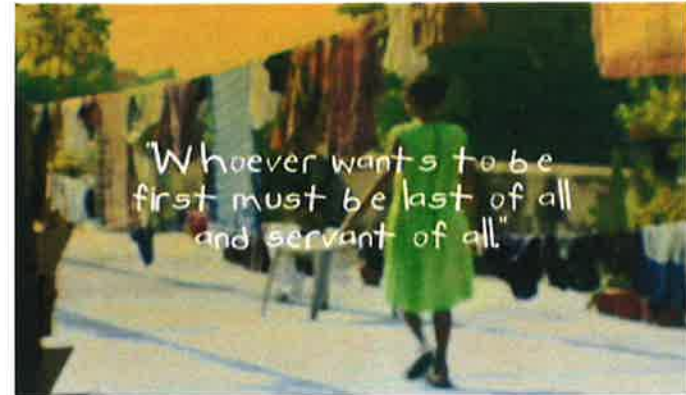


Sermon Notes, Sunday 21 October 2018

Kingscliff and Pottsville

Radical Reorientation



informed by God's bigger picture? In what ways do we need to be reoriented or corrected in our discipleship? As individuals we might ask ourselves, "how can my life be a blessing and a service to those around me?". As a church, "how is the life of this community of faith a blessing and a service to the wider community?"

Dr Murray Harvey

Notes

1. David Rhoads in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Oct 1993 Vol. 47 (4) pp. 358-369
2. Rhoads, p. 359
3. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible V*, 1896
4. Lindsay Wilson, *Job: Old Testament Commentary*, 2015, pp.181-183
5. *Christian Reflection*, The Centre for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2001

Further Reading

Regarding the reading from Job today:

Pentecost 20, 2009, The Old Testament Readings: Weekly Comments on the Revised Common Lectionary, Theological Hall of the Uniting Church, Melbourne, Australia:
<http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/WebOTcomments/OrdinaryB/Pentecost20.html>

In today's Gospel (Mark 10:35-45) the ten apostles overhear what the other two (James and John) have to say to Jesus. They ask Jesus to give them each a special place, one at his right hand and one at his left. The others feel James and John were exalting themselves and seeking preferential treatment. By seeking this status or special place they are following the world's standards. Possible motivations to follow this way are many. Some say fear, others status. Each has its basis in a self-centred approach to the world. By contrast, Jesus urges putting others first, and self last.

"... whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant ... For the Son of Man not to be served but to serve ..." (10:43-45).

Those who live this way relinquish worldly motivations of life, status and power in order to bring the Good News of the Kingdom to others. Here we have a key theme in Mark's Gospel that comes through clearly in today's passage. Saving ones life out of *fear* versus losing ones life for others out of *faith*. Here is a contrast not just between two ways of *acting*, but two ways of seeing the world, two sets of *values*: what God wants for people and what

people want for themselves. Biblical scholar David Rhoads sees Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, which includes today's Gospel portion, as a journey encompassing a clash of values between Jesus who teaches what *God wants for people* and the disciples who exemplify *what people want for themselves*.¹

The context of today's passage is that it is set in a three part block of teaching about discipleship:

Mark 8: 31-9:29

Mark 10: 17-31

Mark 10: 32-45

In this block of teaching Jesus prophesies three times about his impending persecution and death (8:31-9:1; 9:30-50; 10:32-45). Each has a similar structure or common form. After each prophecy by Jesus, the disciples show some misunderstanding or don't accept his teaching. After these responses, Jesus offers some teaching to re-orient them towards his way of understanding or seeing the world.

Here are some of the features of these opposing ways in Mark's Gospel. Characters in Mark's Gospel embody one or other of these two ways:²

What people want for themselves

Self centred
 Save one's own life
 Acquire the world
 Be great
 Position of power/status
 Anxiety
 Fear
 Harming others
 Loyalty to self

What God wants for people

other-centred
 lose it for the Kingdom
 give up possessions
 be least
 servanthood
 faith
 courage
 saving others
 loyalty to God and others

As we look at the world around us, perhaps we can recognise these ways in our own experience today? What do you want for yourself? How does it measure up to what Mark's Gospel says that God wants for you?

The logical consequence of the way that *people want for themselves* is more than just a life of self-interest. According to 18th Century Biblical commentator Matthew Henry, "If Jesus would gratify all our desires, it would soon appear that we desire fame or authority, and are unwilling to taste of his cup, or to have his baptism; and should often be ruined by having our prayers answered. But he loves us, and will only give his people what is good for them".³ This warning still rings true today.

In the Old Testament reading, we also see a re-orientation towards God's way. Job is humbled in the face of God's presence. The speeches of God in Job (Chapters 38-42) are designed not to humiliate, rebuke or belittle Job but to reorient him to right relationship with God. Job is enabled to proceed in a new direction. The first speech 38:2, which is part of our reading today, draws our attention to God's design and control of the world in contrast to Job's lack of knowledge, while the second (40:8) contrasts *God's justice* with Job's seeking to *justify himself*.⁴

Like the disciples in the Gospel who wanted special positions of honour, Job's words have revealed a limited understanding of God's purposes. Job is reminded that he needs to be informed by a bigger picture. Scholar Lindsay Wilson writes that Job's view, like ours, is *telescopic* in contrast to God's *panoramic* view. Job's limited knowledge is exposed. We need to remind ourselves that God's panoramic view is broader than our limited view, flavoured as it is by our needs and concerns. Norman Wirzba puts it more dramatically:

*When God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, he [Job] realizes that God delights in a wild creation that exceeds the vision and interest of humans. Understanding our place in the creation requires that we see it in terms of God's intention and scale.*⁵

In both Mark and Job we see a reorientation towards a set of values and a perspective that are in contrast to that of the world. Yet James and John are not harshly rebuked by Jesus, but taught the way of discipleship. Job is not belittled, but reoriented towards God's way. Jesus leads by example: even he came not to enjoy the service of others but to adopt the way of servanthood.

How can we set aside our own needs, priorities and interests, and live lives