

Sept 23, 16, Anthon UMC, Mk 9:30-37, "Who Here Wants to Be First?"

A politician was sitting at his campaign headquarters when the phone rang. He listened intently, and after a moment phoned his mother to tell her the good news.

"Mom," he shouted, "the results are in. I won the election!"

"Honestly?" she asked.

The politician's smile faded. "Aw, Mom, why bring that up at a time like this?"

We all like to come in first, don't we? We all want to be part of the crowd chanting, "We're number one! We're number one." And this time of year, homecoming football games are all around us, shouting out their status!

Joe Jacobi former American football offensive lineman of the Washington Redskins once said, "I'd run over my own mother to win the Superbowl." He won 3 while he was on the team.

Hearing Jacobi's boast, Matt Millen, former linebacker of the Oakland Raiders at that time, replied: "To win, I'd run over Joe's Mom too." Ah the heroes of our day!

Children too often are carefully taught, without ever speaking the words, that winning is the most important thing. I know when it comes to sports there are good ethical coaches among us who try their best to instill good sportsmanship in the kids, but when push comes to shove, somehow these kids receive the message that winning is everything, and sadly enough there are times we see good sportsmanship and respect for other's gifts and talents on the field, lacking. Even in local games some teams play unfairly, and at their home games the adults in charge have been known to bend the rules to help them gain points. You see, it's all part of winning the world's

game of life at any cost. Children are taught early-on Vince Lombardi's legendary quote which states, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing."

Oh yes, our Jesus was a winner and he knew that at any cost he had to play to win. He was willing to put himself under the same rules we play. He disciplined himself to play by our rules to let us know he was one with us. He even lived under the tough unfair man-made rules of Jewish hierarchy, which did not necessarily reflect his Father's rules. However, the way he worked within those rules of worldly thinking was to turn them upside down. Jesus turned rules about who are the winners and who are the losers, and what makes one a winner or a loser, upside down. At the time of history our Scripture in Mark was written about, Jesus was coming from the north country, an area where he was accepted and heading for Jerusalem and the cross to a place where he was not. No one with any worldly logic, ever heads toward a cross, except our man Jesus. He and his disciples were coming to the town of Capernaum and Jesus was teaching them along the way. Jesus, the famous healer and teacher, for the second time, told them plainly the upside-down news that he was going to be betrayed, killed, and the third day rise again. It's human nature to want to detour around any talk of the cross. It's beyond our comprehension to consider the meaning of the cross. It's upside down in our way of thinking for God to allow His son to die to bring we who sinned, eternal life.

. The disciples didn't understand such logic and if we're honest we would admit, we don't either. Many of us are taught from childhood that if you don't understand what someone is talking about, rather than ask questions, you just keep quiet and look at your shoes or mutter to the person next to you. This the disciples did. They were afraid

to ask their fearless leader why on earth he was talking about a cross, so they traveled on, dismissing this confusing negative news Jesus kept repeating.

Obviously someone, maybe Peter, had a house waiting for them when they reached Galilee, and Jesus and his disciples had plans to stay there. The Son of Man may not have had a place to lay his head, but God always seemed to provide one just the same.

The disciples had been talking worldly logic to each other as they traveled, actually arguing, debating, mincing words like children, about who would be the greatest in this new kingdom Jesus was building with his outstanding ministry. What joy to think about success just ahead! After all they had been following this preacher for nigh on to 3 years at this point. The rewards for such service had to be great, for Jesus could do anything and he was teaching them that they could too! What a team they made, but you know every team has its best players and these two disciples thought they should get a word in ahead of the others about who should be the quarter back and who should be the running back. Let the rest of the guys run interference. Who knew Jesus was tuned in to their conversation? Do we realize Jesus is tuned into ours?

There are times I'd like to think Jesus is not tuning in on my thoughts and my words until I invite Him to. However, we all make some serious bloopers and Jesus does hear them. Psalm 139 vs 1 affirms this saying, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me." "Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, You know it completely."

Nowadays so much we say is spoken over a microphone or recorded for transmission somewhere, even caught on a cell phone, there is very little that cannot be heard by a great number of people, especially embarrassing or rude remarks.

One of the rudest remarks aired some time back was made by Rapper, Kanye West, who took it upon himself at an MTV video awards to interrupt the acceptance speech of the then, upcoming country music star, Taylor Swift. Before she got to express her thanks for being chosen he took it upon himself to take her mic, and publicly say that the best female video should have gone to Beyoncé'. West finally apologized for shooting off his mouth in an inappropriate time and place and said he would take some time off to analyze how he's going to improve. He must have analyzed a lot as in 2014 he married Kim Kardashian and in 2015 he announced he's running for president in 2020. We shall see how he improved. Somehow what we say into mics and facebook and on twitter really gets broadcast and recorded and repeated making us look like we should stop and reflect rather than speak. Look at the politicians using their words daily in ads to expose one another's short comings until we know them better than they do themselves. And look at congress fighting to confirm or not to confirm a man to the Supreme Court because of what he did or didn't do when he was a teenager. So many words and deeds desperately used to win at any price, this politically high office.

Our worldly thoughts and words can really get us in trouble. And even if the rest of the world never gets wind of them, God does. God does and Jesus did. When they admitted they were arguing about who was the greatest, Jesus realized that his teaching moments about servanthood were not getting through to the disciples. In fact his words were going right over their heads. They had bigger fish to fry. The disciples wanted to be the greatest, just like Kanye West wanted who he wanted, the winner of the awards, not to be the one that was picked by those in authority. The disciples wanted who they wanted to win...and they wanted themselves.

Jesus was not giving up on this crew of his, no matter how far off base they were with where he was going. How would you feel if Jesus played back to you what you had earlier just thought about, complained about, plotted about or discussed with another about the future you planned for yourself, at the expense of what God wanted for you? Would you apologize like Kayne West did when he spouted off strong words he had no right to spout? In that event, Kayne West finally got the message that he was looking like a fool, trouncing Taylor Swift, like a deer in the headlights. We can get too big for our britches and when we get older it really looks bad on us.

And so, Jesus really has to lower the bar of his teaching and preach a Children's Message for the disciples, complete with a live illustration to get the point across that "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Jesus stoops down and takes a child in his arms. Jesus stoops. The master of the universe stoops to embrace a child. In today's world the smallest undisciplined child often rules the adult, but not in Jesus' time. They were next to nothing in importance or power and they had no doubt about who was in charge. But Jesus takes a child, showing it off to his disciples, holding it in his arms and lifts up a child as an example of who they are to be. What a strange thing for Jesus to do! An upside-down sounding thing, but let us think about the virtues of children....

In early childhood children are relatively untouched by prejudice or self importance. They will do the sweetest things to help out another they see needing help no matter who they are. They will play with other children without noticing the color of their skin, or if they do, they don't yet know it makes a difference. Children aren't born knowing hurtful words, and that this life is a giant competition where winning is the only thing that

matters. However, they are quick learners and will pick up what you teach them for better or worse in no time.

If you have a child in your care or under your power, you will be required one day to answer for what you have taught them. The news seems filled today with people who harm and mistreat children. In the news Saturday was the killing of babies in a daycare facility in New York City. The random killing of young woman jogging in our own formerly considered peaceful Iowa is unthinkable as was destroying the life of a young Iowa State student on a golf course. Add to that the Human trafficking and destroying the lives irreparably are reported everyday as common occurrences.

Children are a priceless treasure. Upon that we all would all agree. However, any treasure needs to be guarded and taken special care of so it increases and becomes shaped for use by the God who gave it in the first place. To do this appropriately and effectively we must raise them with the rule book that teaches them, not only God's rules, but that the first rule of God is always the grace that flows from the Word of God found in our Bibles, and by the ways of God we share with them so that they learn to put others first.

Isn't it interesting that when Jesus said that we must be servant of all, he took a child and set him in the midst of them. And when he had taken the child in his arms, he said unto them, "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." If we are going to be a great church, we must be a church that serves boys and girls and young people, the middle age, the elderly and the entire church family, as well as the community outside.

I want to end this message with you a story of 3 small children I baptized some years back. I had a practice run with them the day before, the youngest of which was three. We decided the oldest child who was 8 would be first, the 6-year-old second, so when we got to the 3-year-old she would feel confident it was ok for her to do this. However not only did she think it was ok thing to do, but when I asked on Sunday morning before the congregation, who would like to be first, expecting the older sister to reply, the little one, standing on tiptoe on a step behind the baptismal font, barely able to be seen said loudly, "I do! I do!" I want to be first!" The whole church laughed with delight. Jesus must have been pleased! Young as she was she had picked up on the fact that Baptism was an exciting thing she was doing in God's church. Her little heart was opened to Jesus and she wanted to be first to be marked by the water as His. I'll carry that story in my heart as a treasure forever reminding me we are all to be like an eager child wanting to be first, when God calls us to follow him. Let us not be so concerned with being first in the world's eyes. The question of the day Jesus is asking us today is who here wants to be first with God and what are you willing to sacrifice to be there?