

# SERMON NOTES Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2024

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **Influence and Greatness**

Passages: **Mark 9.30-37, James 3.13-4.3 and 7-8a.**

**Some of the main themes from the sermon**

**The disciples are confused (again)**

In Mark's Gospel the disciples seem to get confused quite often. Jesus sometimes takes them on one side to explain things (eg the parable of the sower in Mark 4). At other times the disciples just get things wrong, such as when they fail to understand Jesus' capacity to feed the five thousand or walk on the lake). A bigger confusion emerged once Jesus began talking about his impending death and resurrection. Peter, who had just declared that Jesus was the Messiah then rebuked Jesus for speaking like this and is in turn rebuked by Jesus (Mark 8. 27-33). And now in v32 on today's passage, the disciples are flummoxed again.

**Seeing and not seeing**

Though it's tempting to think of the disciples as a bit slow on the uptake, I have great sympathy for them. I think I'd have been every bit as confounded by the new truths I was learning. Often, learning something that is radically new has to be done in stages. We can see the logic of God's plan of salvation from behind; from the vantage point of the Spirit filled early church, indwelt by the risen Jesus. For the disciples it was happening in real time. And it was all very new and completely unprecedented. Even as they grasped that Jesus was God's Messiah and was bringing in God's Kingdom, they simply could not conceive that he would 'suffer many things, be killed and rise again' (v31). That was not in the script!

**Status, rivalries and pecking orders)**

Another thing they just hadn't grasped was the completely different relationships and priorities that God's Kingdom called into being. They will have heard the Sermon on the Mount and seen Jesus' example but they were still concerned about 'who was the greatest'. A bit later, James and John are still hankering after 'top dog' status, to the annoyance of the other ten disciples (Mark 10.35-45).

**Jesus' way of relating to people**

Jesus explains that status, bitter envy and selfish ambition have no place in God's Kingdom. He illustrates this by taking a person of lowly status in his culture, a child, and says that to welcome such a person is to welcome Him and to welcome Him is to welcome the very God who created the universe. The God, incidentally, who made that child in God's image!

**Learning by doing**

This is more than just confusing for the disciples and for us. It cuts against our very desire to assert ourselves, to be top dog, to be noticed and praised for our cleverness, goodness or ability. It was then and is now the most counter-cultural message possible. The only way to learn Jesus' way is to do it, time and time again until it becomes just part of who we are. It is a long and tough journey. For my part I'm just at the beginning.

**What might this mean in practice**

- Not trying to big up our achievements
- Spending time, interest and energy on people who God has put in our way, even if we may want to spend time with people who may be more interesting or advantageous to us
- Not kidding ourselves that we are nicer than we are just because kind people tell us they like us
- Trying to spend as much time listening in a conversation as talking.
- Not keeping a mental list of people to seek and people to avoid.

**Some questions for thought and discussion this week:**

1. **Look at the list above: Do any of the bullet points make you a little uncomfortable? Can you do anything in the coming week or two to behave more like Jesus' imitator and disciple?**
2. **Think of a person you admire for their Christian life and witness. What about them is particularly attractive?**
3. **Do you have any ambitions that you need to call into question because they don't really align with Jesus' way of doing things?**
4. **Mark Twain said, 'It's not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts that I do understand'. What do you think about this quote in relation to our passage from Mark?**

**A quote to think about:**

**'As the wise theologians often say, we are punished by our sins not for them.'**

**Ryan J Stark**