

Living and Loving for the Long Haul*

Mark 9:30-37

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St. Barnabas, Chelsea

I propose to show that if we stick around long enough—eventually we get it—we learn and see and come to know intimately what really matters, so that those hearing this sermon will settle in for the long haul of meaningful relationships.

May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen.

Please be seated.

Good Morning!

They were a fragile lot: living and breathing: alive. Then, gone. Like all of us, one out of one of us as I once read on a cheery Unitarian bulletin board: one out of one of us dies. They were fragile. And so are we.

They were a shallow lot too. But just shallow enough to be attractive. The kind of shallowness that when we are grounded and have some distance and perspective the kind of shallowness that reminds us of ourselves. We see their ever so apparent flaws, it reminds us of ourselves and actually makes us like them more, we feel better about ourselves at their expense—but what the heck.

Jesus said, “So what were you talking about, what were you arguing about along the way?” I heard you. It was actually hard not to hear you. What were you arguing about?

Was it politics? Was it the stupid thing Peter just said? Was it the Michigan USC game? Or the Spartans vs Boston College? The election?

Well now, no one is saying anything to anyone, for each is completely annoyed at the other. They seem to have hit that storming stage of group development. Before this they had really just been coalescing as a group—“forming” as some sociologists would tell us. Jesus has fed the 5000, walked on the water, healed a whole bunch of people—and they are on the inside. For the first time in their lives, they are part of the cool kids club. But now—the last few days—well it’s been contentious—jockeying for positions and power. Who matters more, who matters most, and who are we slightly embarrassed to be seen with in public. The Jesus train has left the station and they want to know what role they are going to play in his upcoming administration.

The problem however seems to be that he’s going a different way. He’s talking about dying. He’s talking about the human one being raised from the dead. And he’s

not taking the smartest people's advice. His talking points are flat. Frankly, he's something of a PR nightmare.

So, when he's not around they are trying to sort things out and figure out how to manage him to make the best use of his gifts but keep him away from the touchy subjects---Let's keep going with the miracles— and let's go easy on the dying and rising predictions—that's freaking people out.

Here's the thing. The apostles, the people in the bible, the ones most like us, thought they knew what they wanted out of Jesus. They thought they knew what would make him a success. But they blew it. If I'd been there—no doubt I'd be one the ones making an even bigger mess.

Jesus had to keep on sitting down with them and clarifying, realigning their hopes and expectations. Over and over again, even if it was highly unlikely that they were capable of fathoming the big picture of a messiah who overturns everything through love—all the while seemingly failing to vanquish the bad guys. Jesus keeps sitting down with them and saying, it's not about winning its about serving. It's not about ostracizing but including. It's not about destroying but recreating. It's not about power, but connection.

Ahhhh Ok Jesus. If you say so.

The piece I long to learn about this passage today, the piece I need to integrate, (and if it is helpful for you—more so the better) the piece I need to know is that no matter how many times we get it wrong—Jesus is there to explain it to us all over again.

As I read this colorful passage with the apostles jockeying for position. I imagine him sitting down, breathing deeply and telling me and Peter, James, John: telling us all one more time:

Bonnie, its not about being the greatest. It's not about winning. It's not about getting your heart's desire—its about caring and loving. It's about screwing it up and having grace to start again, and this time get a little bit more of it right.

Grace, God's love, is a long muscle fiber, it is there in our body, keeping us moving for the long haul. I am convinced, it is about the long-haul that enables us to live into and live out Christ's call to us as individuals and as a community.

It is in our ability to continue in long-term relationships (ones that are healthier than not.) I'm certainly not saying to stay in relationships that are unhealthy or destructive for our spirits. But in those other relationships—the flawed—not perfect ones—I think it is there that we see, can experience and model God's continual hope for us—to get what it means to be followers of Jesus. To change and

love and grow and live our lives in such a way that our world is reformatted. To live in a way that the people in our lives, or siblings in our congregations, our colleagues at work and our interesting relatives who have very different political perspectives, with all of these amazing, flawed individuals for us to stay connected with them through it all, for the long haul. For us to love them, listen to them, care for them as we long for them to hear us. For us to live and love and learn, just as Jesus does, knowing that Jesus Christ, no matter what loves us, and will sit down with us, AGAIN, one more time, as if it is the first time, and explain what it means to transform the world through love.

It's not about power and prestige, it's about serving, and learning, and being connected for the long, long haul.

And bit by bit, morning by morning, we move closer to God's holy call: to love one another as I have loved you.

Amen.