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On the Mend: Healing What Ails Us “Healing Pride”

Mark 9:33-35

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I admit it. I am a fan of the TV show Spartan and Spartan racing. If you’ve never seen it, it is a team competition in which the best time through an obstacle course decides the winner.

The other night, there was a profile on one of the team captains, which showed him as a child, and teen, who spent all his time in sports competition. He began to hate all that was associated with playing that sport, which eventually drove him to having significant anxiety and depression. He then went on to explain that he has found Spartan racing to be a turning event for him. For it is not all about the winning, but about having fun. So much so, that he expresses this fun spirit by always wearing a thong during competition, which he chooses to reveal underneath his shorts about half way through the race.

The disciples have set up a bit of a competition between them, and thus end up with arguing about who amongst them is right, first, the greatest – in other words who is going to win.

This battle of words comes right on the heels of Jesus announcing he is going to die. So, guess one better jump when the opportunity presents itself. So much for letting the grave new settle, they sense a soon to be void and jumped in to take “their rightful place.” You’ve see this right, in other places with other people, and maybe even you have seen yourself in this “dilemma” or what some would call an “opportunity”.

Jesus was not a fan of this strategy. I am sure he could see they were trying to fill on, so things could continue. But, it did not

get by him the strategy they used – with the need to be right, to be first, and to “win”.

Whenever we insist on being right and close ourselves down to the ideas and opinions of others, we put distance between ourselves, and them. Jesus’ plan was for us to come together, not for us to be alienated by and distant from one another due to someone trying to get to the top refusing to hear anyone else other than himself or herself. Insisting on being right repels, not attracts.

Then, there is the problem with being first. Being first can give you a skewed perspective. It is pretty lousy place to be when what is needed is a 360-degree view, rather than just a 12 o’clock observation deck. In the hurry to get to the front, we often miss what is around us, we often bypass that which we need to notice, see, and understand. It’s no wonder that Jesus said on one occasion that we should be last. Why? Because then we are able to see all that we need to see and understand before we act.

One other problem from God’s perspective is that in being first, we often to step on or over people on the way to being front and foremost. Let’s face it, there is a self focus (sometimes it could be called self-centeredness) that is necessary if someone is going to get first place.

The problem with going for the win is that you can, if you are not careful, be allured into thinking that others are less than you because they lost and you won. You can think you got there all by yourself and that others are not necessary, maybe even expendable. And lastly, you might just get in the habit as a winner of thinking you can ignore everyone else, for you are the winner and they are not! Thus, who needs them!

In the verses of scripture read this morning, we see Jesus taking a child who is nearby and says welcome his one, and in so doing you welcome me. Children in Jesus time were considered the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. They were seen as weak, fragile, not cut and adorable and the center of our existence as we do in our culture. Rather, Jesus was confirming in this conversation, one again, that they are not to be overlooked, passed by or stepped upon. Pay attention to the fragile, vulnerable and weakest among us. For it is not at all about clawing your way to the top! It was about looking around, bending down, and giving your hand to another for both a hand out and a hand up.

Whether we like it or not, Christianity, the following of Jesus, is a team sport. This is brought home in the early church, when the apostle Paul talks about the Church being the Body of Christ. And he goes on to say in his discussion about the Body, that the eye cannot say to the hand "I don't need you." All our needed, none are expendable! So pushing aside, and stepping on are not things, which should ever be a part of the Church or the lives of the followers of Jesus.

The teachings of Jesus encourage us to move in the direction of humility and away from the practices which can go with always being right, being first no matter what it takes, and winning as the sole goal of each endeavor.

Could this be why the Bible speaks over and over again, about humility and pride? According to scripture, one is a good thing – humility, the other – pride, nothing, but trouble. And yet, despite the consequences, it may be difficult for us to discern what true humility looks like, and what are the attitudes

behind pride. So, let's try this list on for size to see if it fits or helps clarify humility and pride.

"The humble heart
is compassionate and forgiving,
is dependent and recognizes their need of others,
is willing to yield the right to be right,
desires to serve and to give,
is motivated to be faithful and make others a success,
rejoices when others are recognized,
is humbled by how much they have yet to learn,
is willing to risk getting close to others,
accepts responsibility, and sees where they could be wrong,
and is quick to admit their failure and seek forgiveness

On the contrary, the proud heart
is critical and fault finding,
is independent and self-sufficient,
wants to prove they're right,
desires to be served and to receive,
has a drive to be recognized and appreciated,
thinks how lucky others are to have me serve them,
is wounded when others are recognized,
is confident in how much they know,
privately keeps others at arm's length,
and is quick to blame others,
(Chris Mueller)

A reporter interviewed singing virtuoso Marian Anderson and asked her to name the greatest moment in her life. She surely had many wonderful moments from which to choose. There was the night Toscanini told her that hers was the finest voice of the century. There was the private concert she gave at the

White House for the Roosevelts and the King and Queen of England. She had received a \$10,000 award, for being the person who had done the most for her hometown, Philadelphia. To top it all, there was that Easter Sunday in Washington, DC when she stood beneath the Lincoln statue and sang for a crowd of 75,000, which included Cabinet members, Supreme Court Justices, and most members of Congress. Which of those big moments did she choose? None of them. Miss Anderson told the reporter that the greatest moment of her life was the day she went home and told her mother she wouldn't have to take in washing anymore." ([Alan Loy McGinnis in The Friendship Factor, p. 30](#))

“Whoever wants to be first, must be least of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35b)