

3/4/2018

“What Were You Arguing About. . .?”

Scripture: Mark 9:33-37

Lenten Series: Questions Along the Way

Third Sunday in Lent

Mark 9:33-37

*They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “**What were you arguing about on the road?**” But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “**If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.**” He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to 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.**”*

Theme: Jesus once again turns the tendency toward personal pride and prestige upside down by teaching his disciples that the measure of greatness was making oneself least and putting oneself last.

As we continue with our Lenten sermon series of Questions Along the Way, we consider the interaction which takes place as they walked through the region of Galilee, on the way to the town of Capernaum, home to Peter and Andrew and some of the other disciples.

As gathered from the gospel, some of the disciples had been arguing about something along the way. But when questioned later by Jesus, they were embarrassed to admit what it was about.

*They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “**What were you arguing about on the road?**” (some translations say “discussing”)*

However, all the translations say, *But they kept quiet, because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. (vs. 33-34)*

So, have you ever felt embarrassed that way? As a child, a teen, or even as an adult.

Whether it was arguing over who’s the greatest or over something else that really doesn’t matter that much, but felt too embarrassed to really admit what you were talking or arguing about.

If we really thought that Jesus was watching or listening to us at every moment, would we still do the things we do? Would we still say the things we say? If we really acknowledge that God is omnipresent – in all places at all times – what difference would it make in our lives?

Here’s a modern day version of being “caught in the act” so-to-speak. Take a look at this humorous video clip from TV’s Everybody Loves Raymond:)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7cTqnH9Xyc>

As you may know, I grew up in Philadelphia, in a family of Jewish and Italian descent. My

parents were both born and raised in the USA to immigrants. They were raised in the difficult times of the Great Depression and World War II during their young adult years. They were intelligent – and fairly opinionated. (They saw some things differently and hardly ever voted, because they would be voting for opposite candidates.) And all of us children got both of those characteristics from them.

There was plenty of sibling rivalry, especially at games. Some of it helped us achieve better academically or physically. Being the fourth child, I usually took it all in, learning from various perspectives, though still drawing my own conclusions. Some of the conflicts were over who sat where at the table or in the car. With good parenting for the most part, it all worked out well – and we usually helped and stuck up for each other, as we still do.

I'm sure most families have some conflict. Sometimes, it isn't handled very well, and outside help is needed. Sometimes, we have to set aside our own pride, or the need to be right, for the sake of our relationships. When it came down to it, both of my parents knew and taught that what was most important is love. And, sometimes that love means making sacrifices for another.

Which leads us to ask . . .

† **Is being first or number one so important that we forget that we are all God's children?**

Or do we get into sibling rivalry so much that we live it out our whole lives through?

Well, don't feel alone if you've ever found yourself playing that part. Jesus' own disciples were caught up at least verbally about "*who's the greatest?*" It was obviously something the early church struggled with as well, as recorded in the Book of Acts. And, to a degree it continues still today.

One situation which the Apostle Paul addressed was recorded in his letter to the Philippians (2:1-7 NRSV):

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. . ."

That's an admonition that can be applied anywhere in our daily lives – at home, school, work, or church; in the community, social media or on the internet.

Now that's not to say that competition is all bad. But, rather than arguing with each other about greatness or importance, or deciding who should get the best seat . . .

† **Jesus again places the emphasis of greatness on receiving the "least important", and serving others.**

Here again, sometimes it takes sacrificial love.

And rather than thinking of oneself as better than others and excluding those who are less, **Jesus calls for an attitude of humility and hospitality to the least and lowest.**

As the Wesley Study Bible notes, “Despite Jesus again teaching his disciples about the way of the cross, they still argue over which of them is the greatest. Jesus tells them that their priorities are all wrong. Rather than seeking to be the first by conventional standards, they should seek to be the first by Jesus’ standards, which means becoming last and serving others.”

I’m very thankful that the emphasis here at CCUMC is on serving others in Christ’s name and spirit and not on seeking power or prestige. If anything, some people don’t come forward to serve in a leadership capacity, because they DON’T want to be noticed or given special recognition.

Or, maybe you at times feel uncertain of your abilities. But Jesus calls us each to serve with humility and love in whatever way we’ve been given gifts and grace to serve. And, we build one another up in Christ, and encourage each to use their gifts and abilities to the glory of God.

What did Jesus do? Notice again how Jesus demonstrated this to his disciples. He sat down and called the Twelve to him.

He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to 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.”*

I’m pleased to say **our church has ministries which welcomes children**, because Jesus said *“Let the little children come to me.”* (Mark 10:14) From including them in worship and Sunday School, to fellowship and other activities, our hearts and our doors are open to welcome the little ones of God. We believe it is important for all God’s children to know that God loves each one, and that Jesus came to show how much God loves them, and wants all of us to love God and love one another.

Perhaps God is calling you to be part of those ministries. We also value the safety and security of those whom God entrusts to us. We strive to use and comply with the Safe Sanctuaries guidelines, to learn and comply with the latest and best efforts to provide a safe environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults.

We also provide a great weekday preschool where children can receive a nourishing environment -- receiving attention to their spiritual, social, intellectual, emotional and physical development.

In addition, we are glad to be blessed and able to open our doors to other programs for children, youth and adults – so that we may welcome all those in need of God’s love, direction and strength. We also serve together with other churches in the Chesapeake City Ecumenical Association in various ways, including the Vacation Bible School (VBS) for children.

As many of you know, one of the greatest and most influential preachers of the last century, Reverend Billy Graham, went home to be with the Lord last week. He was known, loved, and

respected across denominations and faiths. He was welcomed and confided in by US Presidents of both political parties and reached people with the gospel in many countries of different kinds of governments throughout the world. And, he was able to do so, because of his faith in God and humility in Christ. In his book “Life Wisdom from Billy Graham”, which I just came across since his passing, are these words which he considered part of the heart of his message, “God wants us to have compassion on those who are suffering and do what we can to help.” (p. 21, 2006, Hallmark Licensing, Inc.)

>> Let me urge you this week, this season, and throughout the year to strive for greatness in service to others. **Welcome Christ Jesus and God our Heavenly Father by welcoming the least in our midst.**

And together let us continue to welcome and serve all who would seek God’s blessing and grace! May God bless you as you are a blessing to others!