

February 18, 2018: In the Face of Fear

Mark 9.30-50

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Uh-oh. Someone better get Jesus a Snickers...he's gettin' all hangry again!

“If *any* of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great *millstone* were hung around your *neck* and you were *thrown* into the *sea*!

If your *hand* causes you to stumble, *cut it off*!

And if your *foot* causes you to stumble, *cut it off*!

And if your *eye* causes you to stumble, *tear it out*!”

See what I mean?

Jesus is feeeeeeeeee up!

But in *this* instance, I *don't* think we need to blame low blood sugar. In fact, Jesus has *actually* done a wicked good job of staying patient up to this point.

You see, those disciples of his know *just* which buttons to push, and they seem driven to push them at all costs!

So what is it that's gotten Jesus all worked up?

Well, it's that his disciples can't seem to get it through their thick-skulls and hard-hearts that Jesus is going to die.

For the second time in as many weeks, Jesus told his disciples about his impending death.

"The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."

And just like the first time, his disciples didn't understand what he meant.

But *unlike* the first time, *this* time it went *beyond* mere confusion...the disciples were *afraid* to ask Jesus about it.

Which is actually kind of understandable, right?

I mean, if *your* master told you that she was going to die, you'd be scared too!

But there's more to it than this.

Because Jesus' death isn't *just* about him dying...Jesus' death is actually about who God is.

We heard this in our story last week:

After Jesus told his disciples that he was going to die, Peter rebuked him, told him he was wrong, told him that he couldn't possibly die.

But Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind *not* on divine things but on human things."

Jesus' death on the cross tells us about the divine, it tells us about God.

It tells us that God does *not* care about keeping up appearances.

It tells us that God does *not* care about power and majesty.

It tells us that God does *not* care about being right.

God cares about the weak, and the powerless.

God cares about the sick, and the oppressed.

God cares about the dying, and the mourning.

And Jesus is willing to die to show us this.

In fact, Jesus knows that he *will* die to show us this, because God's way, the way of weakness and suffering and death, is the exact opposite of what the world values.

Case in point are Jesus' very own disciples in our story today.

You see, while Jesus had been explaining to them (for the second time) that he was going to be killed and what that meant about God, the disciples had been doing the exact opposite...they had been arguing about which one of them was Tom Brady! The GOAT! The greatest of all time!

So while Jesus was telling them that God's way was the way of weakness, they were arguing about which of them was the most powerful!

I'm sure Jesus' frustration was beginning to grow, but he took a deep breath and tried, yet again, to help them understand.

He gathered a child into his arms and told them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

Quick show of hands: who here thinks that *this* tender scene was the moment everything *finally* fell into place for the disciples and they understood? Anybody?

Of course the disciples still didn't understand!

No sooner had Jesus stopped talking when John (who *is*, in fact, supposed to be one of the leaders in the group) piped up, “Hey Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to *stop* him, because he wasn’t following us!”

Which brings us back full-circle to where we started: No-Snickers-Jesus.

“*Don’t* stop him!

If *any* of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me...!”

The disciples seemed bound and determined to confound Jesus with their obstinate obtuseness.

But like we were saying before, it’s actually pretty understandable.

It goes back to the fear they’re feeling.

When we’re afraid, what do we want to do?

Well, we want to surround ourselves with things that make the fear go away, things that make us feel strong and secure.

So in the face of hearing that Jesus, their teacher, master, and friend was going to die, they chose to focus on which one of them had the most power.

But that's not God's way.

In the face of fear, what does Jesus do?

“The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands...and they will kill him.”

In the face of fear, Jesus...God, chooses to go to the cross.

In the face of fear, God chooses to be put to death.

In the face of fear, God chooses to be killed, right along with the powerless, right along with all of those who do not have the power to stop earthquakes, or floods, or diseases, or accidents...or bullets.

God chooses to die with us...because God has promised us that death is not the end. “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands...and they will kill him...and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”

In the face of fear, God has promised us that there is *nothing*, in life or death, that can *ever* separate us from God and God's love, God's love shown to us in *our* obstinate obtuseness, in Jesus' death on the cross.