

## Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

September 26, 2012

### Lectionary Readings

Wisdom 1:6—2:1, (6–11), 12–22; Psalm 54; James 3:16—4:6; **Mark 9:30–37**

### Background

The Gospel of Mark can be divided neatly into two halves: (1) who is Jesus? (1:1—8:30), which leads to Peter's confession, "You are the Christ" (8:29); and (2) what must Jesus do? (8:31—16:8), which leads to his crucifixion and resurrection. This second division begins with an entire section built around three passion predictions: Jesus will suffer and die (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). After each passion prediction, Mark records both the disciples' misunderstanding and then Jesus' teaching on the nature of true discipleship. The following passage is the second of these three passion predictions.

### Mark 9:30–37

<sup>30</sup> They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; <sup>31</sup> for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "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." <sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

<sup>33</sup> Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" <sup>34</sup> But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup> He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." <sup>36</sup> Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

### Commentary

Throughout the Gospel of Mark, the disciples are prone to misunderstand the words Jesus. For instance, when Jesus speaks in parables, the disciples are able to understand them only after Jesus' explanation to them later. And when Jesus says, "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees!" (8:15), they wrongly think that Jesus was referring to the fact that they forgot to bring bread. And here, as in all of the passion predictions, when Jesus explicitly speaks of his upcoming suffering and death, they miss the meaning of his straightforward statement as they likely attempt to decode some inner meaning. In the disciples' minds, as in the mind of any Jew living in the first century, inherent in the promise of a Messiah is that he would be victorious over Israel's enemies. A crucified Messiah—everyone knew—is a false Messiah. The way of Jesus, then, is not at all what the disciples had in mind.

The disciples' confusion is further evidenced by the argument they have with one another immediately after this exchange. If Jesus is the Messiah, the disciples assume, then as his closest followers, they would be somehow exalted. So then, who would be the greatest among them? And once again, Jesus upends their assumptions. Being the greatest is not about gaining status, self-promotion, or selfish ambition; it is rather found in following Jesus' example to be a servant to all. Jesus points to a child to illustrate his point. In ancient culture, children were viewed as insignificant; they had no status or prestige. As in 9:30–32, Jesus is again turning upside down the way his followers are to think and act.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What questions did this passage raise in your mind?
2. Which part of this passage convicts you the most? Why?
3. Which part of this passage inspires you the most? Why?
4. What part of this passage is difficult to understand?
5. How do the ways of Jesus upend the common assumptions of Christians today?
6. What do you think are some connections between Jesus' passion prediction (9:30–32) and his teaching of discipleship (9:33–37)?
7. What did you learn about God from this passage?
8. Regardless of where your faith is at right now, if you were to apply what we learned about God to something in your life this week, what would that be?

### **Read Psalm 54**

#### **The Collect of the Day**

*Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*