

Canon Davis Memorial Church  
380 Russell St. North, Sarnia, Ontario, N7T 6S6  
(519) 344-9531 • <http://www.canondavis.com>  
September 22, 2024—Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Officiant –Rev'd Paul Woolley – Organist – Dorothy Miller

## Sermon

In Mark's Gospel, he uses literary structures to convey messages. One of his common structures is similar to an Oreo cookie. There is something on both sides, but the most exciting part is in the middle.

Mark also makes some points by placing stories beside each other to make a point that could not have been achieved otherwise. An example would be the disciples' lack of insight into Jesus' identity after the calming of the storm, causing them to ask, "Who then is this?" That is then in direct contrast with the following story, in which a demon knows Jesus' identity

In the passion narrative, the soldiers mock Jesus with a chant of "Prophesy!". In the following story, Peter denies Jesus and provides a direct fulfillment of something that Jesus had prophesied a few verses earlier.

We are justified in thinking about this gospel reading by examining how the preceding and following episodes can be read together. Today's Gospel from Mark's ninth chapter has two distinct episodes, although they both happened while travelling in Galilee.

In the first section, Jesus predicts his death and resurrection for the second time. The disciples' reaction is unsurprising because they have no idea what he is talking about and are afraid to ask. Fear is a common theme in Mark. People repeatedly fear Jesus or some demonstration of the Kingdom of God, the opposite of faith. In the 'calming of the storm,' Jesus demands of the disciples: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Similarly, Jesus tells Jairus about his dead daughter: "Do not fear; just have faith." Faith in Mark is not an intellectual pursuit in which one subscribes to a series of abstract ideas or creeds to be believed. Faith is more about a gut feeling and fortitude.

Mark 9:32 reads, "But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest." So we see the disciples unable to ask Jesus what confused them, which symbolizes a lack of faith in Mark. In the next chapter, Jesus will give a third prediction of his death and resurrection, and the Disciples will again respond with fear.

The second episode confirms the disciples' ignorance. Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about, and the topic turned out to be who was the greatest. The fact that their time had been spent with that question confirms just how hardened their hearts have become (an idea first suggested in Mark 6:52). When we consider Jesus' words about his coming suffering and their argument about who is the greatest is Mark being ironic and it contributes to the continued depiction of the disciples and Jesus.

Jesus then describes the kingdom of God and how its “reality” differs from any human reign. Those most honoured in the Kingdom are the servants and those who are the least. This idea has been shown repeatedly throughout the gospel: the kingdom breaks into the world in the least likely places. The twelve disciples are constantly ignorant and afraid. Those who are successful are ostracized demoniacs, and others who are possessed, along with bleeding women and dead girls, the sick, and those with disabilities.

Another story in the same chapter gives us another insight into what the kingdom is like — the reception of a child. The ancient world was infused with a strong sense of honour and shame. Those who were rich and powerful hoped to demonstrate their honour by the company they kept. At the same time, they could further curry favour and influence through highly respectable social relations.

The author Ramsey MacMullen, in his book *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284*, describes a sense of class in the ancient world that, although recognizable to us today, was of a scale that we might have a hard time imagining. The ancient world had no middle class. Most of the wealth was accumulated at the very top of the social structure, and most people found themselves poor. Within the elite world, honour was significant. Honour and shame were common: “The upper classes emphasized, for everyone to notice and acknowledge, the steep, steep social structure that they topped”. The rich wanted to associate only with other rich; they would intentionally insult and demean those slightly less affluent and hoped to accumulate favour with those above them.

Against that backdrop, Jesus's words in Mark's gospel stand out. Saying that the way to gain honour is to receive those without honour goes against the logic of ancient society. The Kingdom of God assesses and assigns value differently than the human realm. God will receive those who receive the child. This will give access to true power, the power of the one who sent Jesus.



While our modern society is different from the ancient one, there are several similarities and human dynamics we ought to consider. We seek status through cars, clothes, houses, titles, and electronics.

When the Apple Watch was first released, it was available in aluminum, stainless steel, and gold versions. This piece of electronics will be obsolete in two or three years. The only conceivable reason to buy a \$10,000 gold version is status, proclaiming that money can be spent without correlation to value. Daily actions may impact “the least” that we might never consider. Taking seriously the vision of the kingdom of God here in Mark's gospel might cause us to consider those with whom we socialize, what food we eat, and whether we ought to water our lawns — decisions about which can impact the least among us.

---

Good Morning

Another month is just about gone as we welcomed in Fall on Sunday. Sunday was a warm day and then Monday was damp and humid. I always enjoy the Fall weather when it arrives. Have an enjoyable week and take care.

  Sheree Lynn