

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus is on the move and as Jesus travels, he heals and he teaches, especially trying to teach his disciples. To put this Gospel reading into context, it is helpful to remember that in this same chapter of travels, Jesus led Peter, James, and John up a high mountain to be by themselves. There Jesus was “transfigured before them;” his clothes became radiant, reminding us



of Moses when he came down the mountain after receiving the commandments. Peter, James, and John saw Moses and Elijah and heard a voice naming Jesus as God’s own “beloved son.” Not only does Jesus tell them not to talk about this experience, but when his disciples do not understand what he is saying about rising again, they do not ask questions to help them understand. Was it a quiet trip back down the mountain?

More healing takes place and as they walk through Galilee, even stopping to fish and prepare a meal, Jesus wants to avoid the crowds. As they walked or sat on the beach for a simple meal of bread and fish, Jesus tell them again that the Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of other and be killed and after three days will rise. Mark writes “but they did not understand and were afraid to ask him.” Why were they afraid to ask their Rabbi these things? It is the pattern of the prophets to declare God’s word and then to be persecuted. Already John the Baptizer has been killed—the crowds he attracted threatened Herod and Rome. Are they too afraid? Have they forgotten that moment on the mountain?

Walking again into Capernaum, entering a home of one of his followers for a shared meal, Jesus asks one of those questions we might imagine a parent asking kids who were in the back seat after a powerful concert (perhaps even had overheard their conversation) “What were you talking about?”. Mark tells us that the disciples were silent. They had not been talking about the prayer for healing or the mysterious events on the mountain, or about what it means to be a prophet or even where they were going next. They were talking about who was the greatest among them. Who is the best, who is closest to Jesus, who indeed has more power and recognition in the crowds. Status and importance have not been the message of Jesus.

Jesus heals the people on the fringes, the vulnerable, listens to the parents on behalf of their children or friends who have no voice. Jesus serves. When he calls to himself a child, likely a child unnoticed as they peeked around a corner, he is saying not that children are amazing, but that children are vulnerable and that welcoming the vulnerable, being a servant and caring for the other in heart, mind, body and soul is how he desires his followers to act. Caring for the other brings life to the whole community. Can we imagine what the disciples were thinking when he placed his hands on the child’s shoulders in a gesture of welcome? Had they ever considered the importance or relevance of a child to the call of God? Do we believe every child is God’s own beloved child? How do we serve?

