

Sermon Notes – September 22, 2024
The Holy Gospel of St. Mark 9: 30-37
Peace Lutheran Church
“Seduced by the World's Greatness”

Today's readings reflect the tension between human and divine ambitions. Whereas we desire to be first, the way of Jesus calls us to be last.

Today's first reading comes from the first of seven laments attributed to Jeremiah (11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13, 20:14-18). Known as “the weeping prophet,” Jeremiah brought a message of forthcoming exile that was not welcomed and which resulted in hardships for him. He compares himself to a “gentle lamb led to the slaughter” (Jer. 11: 19), an image used for Christ in the New Testament (Rev. 5: 6). People who experience daily injustice know Jeremiah's experience as they entrust their cause to the Lord.

The second reading depicts two contrasting forms of wisdom, one from above, and the other that is “earthly, unspiritual, devilish” (James 3: 15). The former wisdom hears traits like the fruits of the Spirit (James 3: 17-18; Gal. 5: 22-23). The metaphor of “harvest” is fitting for the fall (James 3: 18). Although we do not know the specific “conflicts and disputes” (4: 1) at work in this passage, selfish ambition and envy appear to be the cause (see 3: 14). Submitting to God is the identified antidote (4: 7).

Our gospel reading begins with Jesus' second passion prediction (Mark 9: 31); 8: 31; 10: 33-34), whose significance is clearly missed by His disciples. That the disciples were “arguing” (Greek, *dielogizesthe*, 9: 33) suggests conflict and disagreement between them. In a teaching moment, Jesus identifies being “first” with being “last of all,” and being “greatest” with being “servant of all” (9: 34, 35). He offers as a model a young child (Greek, *paidion*, likely prepubescent). Unlike some societies today, infants were not valued except for their potential to become productive adults. In Roman society, infants with perceived disabilities were often discarded. Jesus identifies Himself - and God - with a powerless child, reflecting His concern for serving the powerless, discarded and voiceless - including, but not limited to, children.

In our society, which lauds self-promotion and personal ambition, the way of Jesus lies in stark contrast. To be servant of all in Jesus' name is to relinquish status and honor, reflecting a counterculture wisdom "from above." In doing so, we welcome the Father in Christ among us.