

Childlike Service

Mark 9:30-37

Introduction

The 2001 Hollywood movie *Pearl Harbor* is a sweeping drama based on real historical events. It tells the story American boyhood friends Rafe McCawley (played by Ben Affleck) and Danny Walker (played by Josh Hartnett) as they enter World War II as pilots. Rafe is so eager to take part in the war that he departs to fight in Europe alongside England's Royal Air Force.

When he first arrives in at the English airfield, he walks by the British Spitfire fighters who were shot up during a battle the previous day. While the commander of the British squadron is showing him the airplane that will be assigned to him, a messenger comes with the news that two more British planes had just been shot down.

The commander turns to Rafe and asks, "Are all Yanks as anxious as you to get themselves killed?" Without hesitating, Rafe responds, "I'm not anxious to die, sir. I'm anxious to matter."

That is a common goal for many of us. Studies show that this question drives many of the decisions people make every day. It shows up in the form of such questions as:

- What will others think of me if I do this (or don't do it)?
- Am I making any kind of noticeable difference in the world?
- Will people miss me when I'm gone?
- Is my salary at a level that communicates importance?
- Do I have the right job title?

It is a problem that has been with us since Adam and Eve ate the apple. It is woven all throughout today's Gospel lesson. Here Jesus contrasts the lives and attitudes of group of small children with the lives and attitudes of his own disciples.

Mark will expand on what we read here in the next chapter of his gospel. There

- James and John wanted to make sure they had the highest positions of prestige and power in the new kingdom Jesus was establishing.

Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. (Mark 10:37)

- That, of course irritated the other 10 disciples, probably because they secretly hoped for the same honor for themselves.

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. (Mark 10:41)

James and John – actually all twelve of the disciples – were not thinking in terms of the Kingdom's value system. The world – where their minds were – values power, prestige, force and might. The world is impressed if my dad can beat up your dad.

Jesus described the world of their day like this:

You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. (Mark 10:42, The Message)

And then He adds this simple sentence:

I don't want it to be that way with you. (Mark 10:42, The Message)

Walking on in Grace means that we find the meaning in life in a whole other way, a way modeled by Jesus Himself.

... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

The example of Jesus shows us that a life that matters is a life that serves. It's one of the things we are asking you to consider as you prepare for next week's Consecration Sunday. How will I serve?

The text tells us that a childlike servant ...

1: SUBMITS ITSELF TO THE WILL OF GOD

In theological terms, the life that matters is first and foremost is a life that submits to the will of God. When James and John asked for preferred seating, Jesus told them "God decides who sits where. Not you."

... to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared. (Mark 10:40)

Leadership Journal is a publication of Christianity Today. In one of the issues a pastor named Steve Cole told about a conversation he and God had while he was out jogging one day. Cole had been reading the biography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers of the 19th century.

As he ran, Cole was asking God to bless his own ministry like God had blessed the ministry of Charles Spurgeon. As he prayed, the name of "John Spurgeon" came to his mind. John was the father of Charles. John, too, was a pastor, and the son of a pastor. John faithfully served a small congregation for many years, but if he was not the father of Charles, he would have died and faded into the memories of his parishioners.

In those moments Steve Cole heard God asking him, "What if I want to make you more like John than like Charles?" Cole writes, "I thought 'Would I be willing to serve God faithfully and raise up my children to serve Him, even if I never achieved any recognition? Even if no one but own small congregation knew my name?'"

He of course said yes, or this would make a lousy sermon illustration. But that's the point, right? What if instead of seats at the right and left hands of Jesus, God preferred James and John to stand at the back of the room?

What if God's will for your life turns out to be different than what you wanted or planned? The life that matters says "Thy will be done."

Next, the example of Jesus shows us that a life that matters ...

2: SACRIFICES ITSELF FOR OTHERS

Verse 39 is a confusing verse, but in it Jesus once again hints at the suffering He will soon endure.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with..." (Mark 10:39)

Jesus isn't talking about Holy Communion here. In the Old Testament, "the cup" was a common metaphor for divine judgment. Jesus will be the sacrifice offered so that you and I can be forgiven of our sins and have eternal life.

For Jesus, the intensity of that suffering would be like "going under." He uses the word "baptism" in the same way the Psalmist and prophets talk about the "deep waters" of suffering or having the floods overwhelm them.

When you live a life that matters, Jesus says, there is a cost to be paid. It is not always a life of ease and peace. There can be a lot of pain associated with it.

Adoniram Judson and his new bride were among the first missionaries to go to the country of Burma (now Myanmar) back in 1812. (This country is just north of Viet Nam.) They had a baby while there, but the baby died due to the poor medical care available to them. They shared their faith for seven years before they saw their first convert. The political officials in Burma didn't like that, so they had Judson arrested and convicted him of being a British spy. He served 21 months of hard labor, and when he was released, his body was covered with the scars of his mistreatment for the rest of his life.

When he was released, he was banned from returning to the province where he had been working before, so he requested permission to go into a different province. The judge refused, saying "I do not believe my countrymen are foolish enough to believe what any missionary might say, but I fear they might see your scars and turn to your religion."

He went anyway, and what the judge feared is exactly what happened. Shortly after his death in 1850 a Burmese government census recorded 210,000 Christians (the equivalent of one in every 58 Burmese citizens).

His scars spoke louder than his sermons. And so do ours. When we allow God to speak through the pain of our sacrifices, He does. And our lives become lives that matter.

Finally, the example of Jesus shows us that a life that matters ...

3: SERVES THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM

The life that matters is marked by a desire to see the needs and interests of others fulfilled before our own.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. (Mark 10:43)

In a world where people demand their rights and their way, disciples say “how can I serve you today?”

Now, remember where we are in this Gospel story. This is Mark chapter 10. Mark chapter 11 begins with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. That means it will still be a few days before Jesus wraps a towel around his waist and washes the feet of his disciples on what we call Maundy Thursday – an event that happens after the Triumphal entry.

We don't know if the disciples had ever seen the important people serving the less important. It certainly wasn't common to their world – just as it isn't common to ours. But in a few days, they would observe the greatest example ever to be demonstrated. Jesus Himself took the role of the servant and washed the feet of the disciples.

Peter, you might remember, objected. “I should be washing your feet.” But Jesus continued His servant's role. He ...

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant... (Philippians 2:6-7)

In the Kingdom of God, the world order is flipped upside down. The up is down. The way to greatness is through service. The life that matters ... serves.

APPLICATION

There is another movie worth seeing. It was released in 2002 and starred Kevin Kline as instructor of Western Civilization at a prestigious, private school. The movie is called *The Emperor's Club*. On the first day of class, Kline addresses about 30 high school boys, all dressed in matching red jackets and surrounded by world maps and busts of Caesar, Pluto and Socrates.

Kline asks one of the students to read a plaque hanging above the door, It said "I am Shutruk Nahunte, King of Ashand and Susa, sovereign of the Land of Elam. I destroyed Sippar, took the Stele of Nirah-Sin, and brought it back to Elam where I erected it as an offering to my god."

The teacher then asks the class "Is any familiar with this fellow? Texts are permissible, but you won't find him there. Shutruk Nahunte. King. Sovereign of Elam. Destroyer of Sippar. But none of his accomplishments can be found in any history book. Why? Because great ambition ... without contribution (is) without significance."

And then he asks his students, "What will your contribution be?" In other words, "How will your life matter?"

Only one life, Twill soon be past.
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Amen.