



Downing Place United Reformed Church

Lent Bible Studies 2021

Week 3: The second prediction of the Passion

Mark 9:30-37: They went on from there (the foot of the mount of transfiguration) and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it 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.' But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

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

This passage follows close on the one we studied last week; but what has happened in between is the transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of Peter, James and John; and a voice came from heaven saying 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' – words similar, but not identical, to those spoken after Jesus's baptism (v 1:11). The words could apply to Jesus's teaching in general, but perhaps they apply in particular to his teaching about his death. Which do you think is more likely? Does this perhaps explain why the disciples 'were afraid to ask him'?

Mark does not tell us what had prompted the discussion among the disciples along the way; indeed he has not mentioned it before. Typically Jesus does not answer the question either: he responds first, by stating a general principle, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last; and perhaps more powerfully by taking a child, and saying, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me', and then extends the principle by adding that such a welcome is a welcome to 'the one who sent me'. Think about that for a moment. Can you think of any other teacher who says anything like that? But remember that the identity of 'the one who sent me' is not disclosed.

What might Mark have intended to convey by placing this story after the other?

What do you make of these two stories, taken together?

Is there anything like this in the Temptation narrative(s)?

How does it change our understanding of what it means to be 'anointed by God' (the literal meaning of Messiah)? Are you surprised that the disciples did not understand and were afraid to ask?