

**Mark 10:35-45**

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Some of you are acquainted with the writings of Margaret Mahler. Mahler was a pediatrician who took a special interest in the severely troubled children she treated in her medical practice. Her interest in these children led her to a career in child psychiatry and the study of childhood development. She was one of the pioneers of the modern theories about the role of attachment and separation in child development.

Mahler observed in children something we see all the time, a behavior she named *rapprochement*. *Rapprochement* has to do with a child's first emotional and physical steps out into the world beyond the immediate presence of his or her parents. It starts with games like "where's baby?" and "peek a book," and progresses to the child hiding behind a chair...running back to the parent, squealing in delight that all is still well.

When the child is ready she or he will venture a bit farther away, perhaps into the next room for a few moments, down the hall, around the corner. And then in the department store they disappear into a rack of clothing that swallows them up like a black hole.

From this point on children venture out and check back in; venture out and check back in, like a young bird flying to an adjacent branch and rushing back, then to an adjacent tree and rushing back, and then out into the larger forest. Sleepovers with friends, lock-ins at church, church camp, vacations with grandparents: all of these are great opportunities for children to venture safely from home and discover that home and parents remain the same, even when the child is gone.

Building on Mahler's important research, more modern students of personality development have noticed two additional things: First, this process of venturing out and checking in never really ends. Regardless of age, people facing a new or uncertain situation in life benefit from checking back in.

Most of us have seen this with a college student away from home. At times they call when they need money, or when they are having a problem of some sort. Then we don't hear from them for quite a while. One evening the phone rings, and their phone number on caller i.d. makes us wonder what is going on. When the conversation is over, we are puzzled. He did not ask for money. She was not having a problem with friends or school. They just chatted a bit and then rushed off mid-sentence when call-waiting beeped. "Bye, talk with you later." It is clear that our child just wanted to connect, just wanted to hear our voice and make sure we still knew who they are.

The second thing about rapprochement, this process of re-approaching one's reliable source: if we are facing a difficult or threatening situation, it is especially helpful to re-connect with important resources before heading out.

When I read Mahler's work years ago, I noticed a connection you have probably made already: this process of moving out and checking in, moving out and checking in, applies to our spiritual life in much it applies to developing a sense of self.

Just as the mother and father serve as reliable sources of security and strength for the child, the resources of our faith provide a similar anchor as we learn to navigate in the larger world - especially when we are afraid. When we are afraid we worry; when we are really scared we pray. Maybe worry is some sort of low-grade prayer.

Those early Christians who heard or read the Gospel of Mark and the Epistle to the Hebrews knew something about venturing out and checking in. Noise outside the door could be the wind, or it could be soldiers coming to arrest the people. Families and friends were puzzled by the conversion of their loved ones to the Jesus movement, and some folks were abandoned by their families for their choice. Worship was often held in secret to avoid trouble.

These earliest believers knew the value of reconnecting with their support system and with the core of their beliefs. Like their Jewish ancestors they developed liturgies and rituals to remind them of those powerful connections – to keep those connections alive and vibrant. Rituals, liturgies, and prayers to keep them connected with the God in whom they had found new life.

Although we don't have to worry about noise at the door (at least most of the time), the world outside the doors is quite different from the values we talk about and sing about in here. It becomes important for us to remain connected with things that really matter because it is easy to lose sight of those things out there with the noise and conflicting values.

Like a child who has wandered too far from its mother at the store, we come back again and again to this place where our spiritual journey began. We come back to be reminded and to be renewed.

If we are willing to have open minds and open hearts, we find more than reminders here. We find the grace of God reflected in the things we do. We find the grace of God reflected in the people around us. And if we really pay attention, we find the grace of God stirring within our very selves. . .

Somehow we know Jesus was right when he talked to the disciples in today's Gospel lesson: servanthood and generosity are the highest priorities, not greed and selfishness. Like Jesus we know how hard it is to let those highest priorities be our guides. Like the disciples, our fear drives us to push and shove and grab for what we can get. Like the disciples our fear drives us to pursue things of little value and to ignore things that last.

The Gospel of Mark paints a realistic picture of the tension between Jesus and his disciples. They wanted him to become king of the mountain, to overthrow the Roman empire and become a new ruler. And they want to be part of his inner circle in the new realm. Over and over, he tried to tell them they were missing the point.

Like the disciples, people of faith have struggled with this dilemma ever since: looking out only for me is a dead end; looking out for all of us is the path to a whole new lease on life. Amen.

