

# Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

## Mark 9:30-37

*Short, easy to use, thought provoking background commentary for your sermon, bible study lesson, or scripture reflection.*

*Listed on The Text This Week, [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com).*

**Year B, Season of Pentecost**

**Proper 20, Ordinary Time 25**

**Sunday Between September 18 and September 24 Inclusive**

**16th Sunday After Pentecost 2009**

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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Today's lesson is the second of three times that Jesus teaches his disciples that they are headed to Jerusalem where he will be betrayed, condemned to death, crucified, and after three days he will rise again. (Last week's Mark 8:27-38 and Mark 10:32-34.)

It is also the second of three times that his disciples fail to understand, and Jesus must teach them about God's honouring that reverses commonly accepted human understandings of honour / status / prestige / salvation.

The disciples' response of not understanding and being afraid to ask about it is not far from our own response to this teaching:

*I don't understand. Didn't I just proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour - Messiah? Doesn't "Lord" and "Saviour" mean "Boss" and "Hero?" I thought we were headed for glory. For good times. For victory.*

*Doesn't Jesus being in charge and our hero mean we get to AVOID pain, humiliation and death? Whoever heard of the guy in charge of it all voluntarily accepting getting killed?*

*I don't get this part. And I am afraid to ask because if I ask, and if he tells me, and if I do get it, then maybe I'll have to give up my dreams of glory, good times, and victory. Avoidance and denial are definitely the preferred plan of action here.*

Not too surprisingly, we discover that this group of uncomprehending-afraid-to-ask disciples have been in glory land while walking to Capernaum and have fallen into arguing about who will have the most glory, the most honour.

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Their response of not understanding, being afraid to ask, and then being silent echoes the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Their initial reaction of being afraid to ask breaks communication with Jesus; breaks their relationship with him. It leaves them with only themselves to talk to, and it leads them to do things for which they feel ashamed to name.

Whereas, their first failure to understand led to Jesus teaching about saving and losing; this time leads to him teaching about being first and last. And again, there is a reversal of common human understandings of these terms:

Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all

*Mark 9:35*

At the time of Jesus, children were the most vulnerable members of society, and the "last of all" in social standing. Welcoming a child in Jesus' name is a radical reversal. Children were not outcasts. But they were non-persons in our midst. Jesus puts this reversal in the starkest, total, terms when he goes on: "whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

One might think that the blessing of seeing how to welcome both Jesus and one who sent him would make our churches full of joyful open arms and welcoming hospitality every time a child or someone new was met. We'd be eager to transform non-persons into honoured guests.

However, once again Jesus is challenging us to reverse long-standing, ingrained, human habits. To set aside our common human understanding of how to win fame and glory, and instead learn from Jesus God's deep hospitality and honouring.

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\* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.