

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard

September 23, 2018

Scripture Readings:
James 3:13-4:3; 7-8a
Mark 9:30-37

What If We Don't Get It?



In 2015 the space we are in today looked more like this

Then in 2016 it looked more like



this



And this

And here we are today. In a space that took years and years of conversation and fundraising and development and prayers and tears and hopes and dreams and disagreements and compromises and a whole lot of faith. For some of you the former facility was never your own, for others it was home. Some of you can share stories of who put up the dry wall or planted the oak tree while others never saw the place. As we sit here almost a year in this space we have a board retreat this afternoon to vision forward and fix some of what still makes it feel like it is not our home. We have a presbytery meeting on Tuesday where this place will be celebrated and dedicated.

I say all of this because a verse in today's gospel stood out to me. Verse 32 "But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him." Jesus has just told them that he is to die and rise again. It seems to me a fair question, something I don't think I would understand if someone said it to me. Still rather than clarify the question the next verse has the disciples arguing about who is the greatest. Isn't that the way we humans work? We have seen it so much in this transition of ours and we still see it as we develop new programs and structures. Rather than ask questions and remain curious we let the changes and the life alterations stress us out. We don't spend time clarifying or problem solving instead we start to argue with one another about who is most powerful. Or who we think is most powerful. Or whose space it is, or who we are catering to or. We get to thinking that someone else thinks they are better or more powerful or have more rights or that they don't care or... And most of the time as James says the things we argue about are more about what is going on inside of us than anything else.

James asks "Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. In Frederick Buechner's book *Wishful Thinking*, he discusses envy. He writes "Envy is the consuming desire to have everybody else be as unsuccessful as you are."

So many of us are afraid of change. I am in close relationship with some people going through huge life changes right now and I am watching them do whatever they can to be in control to be safe and in charge. Change can do that for us, it brings with it fear of the unknown and so we get firm and try to hold onto the reins as tight as we can. Fear can paralyze us from dealing with the real situation. That is what happened for his disciples. In their confusion, denial and fear they start to firm up who is the greatest among us.

This is obviously the opposite of what Jesus is hoping to communicate. He wants them to let go of the old ways of power and authority. He wants them to understand that real power is found in vulnerability in, humility, serving and caring for those who can not offer us more. Who have nothing to give but themselves. That is why Jesus goes to the example of a child. A child can't give us a whole lot of status or power. A child doesn't make us more money or make us more popular or impose our standing in society. Jesus is saying that in God's kingdom greatness is measured by how we welcome those who have nothing to offer. Greatness is measured by how humbly we serve. Who we are in this world and society does not matter to God. Who and how we love is how we will find abundance of life. We don't give so we get back, we give so that others can receive love.

It's so easy to get caught in "it's all about me mode." Our churches are to be about loving and serving others. That is one of the greatest gifts about being a part of Squamish United Church. You have given so much. Sure we ask from time to time what are we getting back - as we have already heard that is human nature. Still that isn't why we built this place is it? Wasn't it so that

we could in a more profound way be an 'inclusive community, caring for God's world.' Loving the community of Squamish in a way we never could have on our own, in our former facility and place? The whole point of today's gospel is that Jesus' message is always about lifting up the other. The church is always about loving and serving others. Sure we care for one another, we covenant with one another, we are here to worship and learn and grow and love together. So that we can go forth and shine God's light everywhere we go. See the church is Never all about me - it's actually all about Christ. Loving and serving others as Jesus did.

It is one thing to talk about change and a whole other thing to live through it. Change involves loss. Loss of who we are, loss of what we know. It's meant to loss of some of our friends and family along the way. Those of you sitting here I want to thank you for being here. For the courage you have taken. For your faithfulness and your attempts at faithfulness. Jesus shows us through his conversation with his disciples today that the most important thing we can do in the midst of transition, change, and loss is keep our eye on the goal. To remember who we are and who we are created to be. In the midst of that to LOVE God, love neighbour and love ourselves and Welcome others into the space so that we create a stronger family and home.

We are to be God's love in the world. Through life, death and resurrection. God is with us and is brilliant at the whole new life thing. God's got this. Our job is to love, serve and welcome in the midst, to share of the gifts we have received. On Thursday afternoon I said to one of the new "Spirit Kids" staff people. "I don't even know what scripture I will preach on this Sunday yet." And she responded "That's the best cause that means you've got to trust that God's got it." She was so right.

God's got this. We are faithful in our steps along the way but this isn't our doing, this isn't our mission it's Gods we are just the hands and feet living out the mission along the way.

When we let go of our ego and our great plans or even our own comfort at times new life comes. That is the story of our faith isn't it. Life, death, resurrection. Letting go of, tearing down what was so something new can be born. Tearing down walls and structures and ways of living that no longer serve us and others. That demolition business opens up opportunities for new life, new ways of living and being. It happens in our lives, it happens in our church. Not just once but over and over and over again.

No matter what change or transition is happening in your life remember it is not yours alone, God is with you. Remember that as you go through it loving and serving others is a part of the journey as well as allowing others to love and serve you. What do you need to let go of so new fullness of life can emerge? In doing so I hope you will discover new purpose, new hope, even resurrection.

Amen.