

Introductory

This text has parallels in Matthew (17:22-23, 18: 1-5) and Luke (9: 43b-45, 46-48). In the TLH one-year lectionary, none of the three times that Jesus spoke of His coming death and Resurrection, recorded three times each by each of the three synoptic writers – for a total of nine mentions in the NT – none are ever appointed to be read on any Sunday, which seems like a glaring omission.

In LW, today's text from Mark is read on Pentecost 18B, and in LSB, Matthew 18:1-20 is read on Proper 18A. Mark continues to relate to us the events immediately following the Transfiguration, things that are mostly contained also, and in much the same form, in Matthew and Luke. In the first part of this reading, Jesus talks about going to Jerusalem to be rejected, killed, and to rise.

This is the second time – the first time was 8:31ff – that Mark records Jesus talking like that, and He will say the same thing once more, in 10:32ff. Matthew and Luke also record that three times Jesus talked like that. Matthew throws in the account of the shekel in the fish's mouth (17:24-27) right here, using it to teach about the Temple tax, an incident not thrown in by Mark and Luke.

The second part of the reading is the infamous account of the disciples discussing among themselves who is the greatest in the Kingdom, prompting Jesus to teach, first by using an oxymoron, and then famously by securing a child, and using the object of a child to teach the adults about the Kingdom. The Matthew parallel is found in 17:22 – 18:5, and in Luke 9:43-48.

This death talk is bad news for these men, and they take it hard, but not as hard as they had the first time. The first time Jesus told these men what was awaiting Him in Jerusalem, they sort of freaked out, Peter actually rebuked Jesus for talking that way, and that's when Jesus called him "Satan" and told him to get back in his lane. This time, they still find such talk to be unsettling.

But none of them says anything about it, maybe because they didn't really hear it, maybe because they did not want to hear about it, and by the third time they seem to have come to grips with what was ahead. I suppose if you call their running off and locking themselves into that room with all the doors and windows closed and locked coming to grips with it, then they did just that.

Textual Notes

30. Having cast the demon out of the boy, Mark tells us that they went "Κἀκεῖθεν ἐξελθόντες παρεπορεύοντο διὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας – from there, having left, they passed through Galilee."

Matthew's parallel account (17:22) has them "ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ – in Galilee." Mark tells us that "καὶ οὐκ ἤθελεν ἵνα τις γνοῖ - He did not want that anyone should know it," about what is he speaking?

Some of the commentators talk about how "the apparent shrinking from publicity which had marked our Lord's action since the feeding of the Four Thousand still continued (Ellicott)." Others see in His attempt for secrecy a desire to get His People alone, undisturbed, so that He could talk to them in private about this very important matter – the second time He talks to them about it.

I think it's more of the former than the latter. He didn't want anybody to know that He was on the move in Galilee – He is "shrinking from publicity" out of a very human desire to get away from the pressing crowds, and that's okay. But that does not rule out the latter altogether. In fact, the next verse indicates that the reason why He is shrinking is so that He can better teach disciples.

We don't do Sunday School or Adult Bible Class during the summer, which has me standing in front of people talking about God for an hour, and that's tiring. Beginning last week, we start up the Christian Education on Sunday morning. I do the common opening, then I teach the adults, then Divine Service, and two hours standing in front of people talking about God is exhausting.

It must have been exhausting for Jesus – if they would have had their way, He would have been constantly standing in front of people talking about God, and oh, could you feed us and heal our diseases, and my boy is possessed by a demon – little help? When I teach Confirmation – Junior or Adult – I really don't want other people around, so that I can focus on the class at hand.

31. Likewise Jesus here. There is a time for interacting with the masses, including miracles and preaching. Now, He does not want other people around "ἐδίδασκεν γὰρ τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ - because He was teaching His disciples." That verb, "to teach" is in the imperfect tense, meaning continuous action, and the "disciples - μαθητάς" do what μαθητάς do; they were learning.

And "ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι Ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδεται εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων – He was saying to them that the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men." The verb "λέγω – to say" is also in the imperfect tense, meaning what it meant in the phrase above. The verb παραδίδεται, here rendered "is delivered," is a present tense form of παραδίδωμι; He is currently being handed over.

That verb is followed by the preposition "εἰς," followed by a noun (hands) in the accusative case, meaning that He is what "being handed over" to men. The KJV (1611) the ASV (1901) both correctly have the verb for "hand over" in the present tense, as do the NKJV and AKJV, affiliate versions of KJV. The rest wrongly make it into a future tense; "will be handed over."

The present tense indicates that the thing of which He speaks is imminent, that even as He speaks, the wheels are already in motion for this handing over to take place. Money will not exchange hands until Maundy Thursday, but from this saying of Jesus we may with some degree of certainty conclude that Judas has already entered into at least preliminary discussions to betray Him.

In John 6:64, at a time which is almost certainly prior to what is going on here (depending on how you view the chronology of John), Jesus Himself had revealed His knowledge that one of them would betray Him. We ought not to get the idea that Judas just came up with the betrayal idea overnight. That's not the kind of thing one does in haste, but only after much time and deliberation.

And after talking about His delivery in the present tense, now we actually have Jesus talking about the future, using the future tenses of two verbs – with an aorist sandwiched in between – to say that two things are coming up; “ἀποκτενοῦσιν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀποκτανθεὶς μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται – they will kill Him, and having been killed, after three days He will rise.”

Twice in that sentence, Mark uses the verb “to kill,” to emphasize that He was really going to be killed dead. It reminds you of that scene in the movie *Unforgiven*, right after The Schofield Kid had killed Quick Mike, who was in the outhouse, and The Schofield Kid says to Will Munny, “I killed him. I killed him good.” Those who killed Jesus thought that they had “killed Him good,”

But as it turns out, it will not be good enough. He concludes “καὶ ἀποκτανθεὶς μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται. – and on the third day, He will rise from the dead.” Whenever He talks about His suffering and death, He talks about His Resurrection. In like manner, when the Preacher talks about the suffering and death of Jesus, He ought to talk also about the Resurrection from the dead.

32. The disciples, upon hearing such talk, “οἱ δὲ ἡγνόουν τὸ ῥῆμα, καὶ ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτόν ἐπερωτῆσαι – did not know the saying, and they were afraid to ask Him.” All the English translations that I'm looking at have these men not “understanding.” No, it's not that they don't understand. It's worse than that. The verb “ἄγνοέω” does not refer to a lack of understanding.

That verb means a total and complete ignorance of what Jesus has been saying. How does that happen? It happens all the time in the classroom. Students get distracted, bored, or loaded up on too many carbs for breakfast, and they're not listening to the teacher. Maybe you turn off the switch because you aren't interested or maybe just don't want to hear it. Why do you not listen?

They did not know what the man was talking about, and moreover they were “ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτόν ἐπερωτῆσαι - afraid to ask” Him. The verb “to fear” in the imperfect tense indicates an ongoing fear of what might happen if they ask Jesus about what He had just said. Of what were they afraid? How about you? What do you fear when you are thinking of asking a question of the teacher?

It's almost as if these men had been with Jesus for many months, and they have seen and heard much, but when it comes to the fundamental meaning of the Life of Jesus, they are clueless. They are in that way precursors to the American Christians who see and hear much about Jesus, but they are likewise ignorant of the fundamental meaning of His death and resurrection.

33. Galilee is a region, and now on to His old stomping grounds, on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, “Καὶ ἦλθον εἰς Καφαρναούμ. Καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ – and they came into Capernaum, and in the

house.” We note here the presence of the definite article “τῇ οἰκίᾳ – the house,” not “a house.” Perhaps there was a particular house that served as a sort of headquarters for Yahweh Ministries.

To review, He has on the road been talking to them, and about important matters – the culmination and meaning of His life is arguably the most important of all important matters. Like the teacher who is teaching important things, but the students are passing notes, whispering, playing with their devices – like any teacher, He knows that none of them have been paying attention to His words.

They are busted, “γενόμενος ἐπηρώτα αὐτούς Τί ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ διελογίζεσθε – having been (in the house), He was asking them ‘what on the way you were discussing?’” He sounds like the teacher who asks the whispering students what they are talking about that is so important as to keep them from listening to him. I can remember teachers saying that to students, and more than once.

The verb used to describe the manner of their talking is διαλογίζομαι.” It’s a word that means some pretty serious cognitive activity is going on, each on in turn making the case for himself or others, and the imperfect tense indicates that their discussion on the road was ongoing rather than one-time. What they were discussing was important – to them, but probably not so much to Jesus.

If you have ever been the parent of children, then you have hauled children around in a vehicle. If you have ever done that, you have been amazed at some of the things that come out of their mouths during the process of hauling. Sometimes it’s almost like they have forgotten that the adult is in the vehicle, and that the adult can hear every word exchanged, because often they do speak freely.

The disciples forgot that Jesus was in the car, and that He would hear every word that they said during this journey. The verb “ἐπηρώτα – He was asking,” is a word for some serious questioning, and the translations that say He was “interrogating” do well. The word itself speaks of confrontation, and the verb is in the imperfect tense, meaning that there were follow-up questions.

34. But it is He who is doing all the talking, and them? They respond by, “οἱ δὲ ἐσιώπων· πρὸς ἀλλήλους γὰρ διελέχθησαν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ τίς μείζων – They were silent, because with one another they had been discussing on the road who is the greater.” In the manner of children who have been called out by the parent, they didn’t want to tell Jesus what they had been talking about.

Here you get a picture of the parent asking the children repeatedly what they were talking about, and none of the children wants to be the first to break the silence. Mum’s the word. Mark tells us the reason why they were silent, and we agree that they should have been “γὰρ διελέχθησαν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ τίς μείζων – because they had been discussing along the road who was greater.”

If you have ever been a parent – or a child – then you know that when the children don’t want to tell you what they were talking about, it’s because they know that what they were talking about is not what they should have been talking about, and they know it. What that Jesus has ever said would cause them to discuss which of them would be greater – or lesser – in the Kingdom of God?

The adjective is the comparative (μείζων - greater), not the superlative (μεγας - greatest), so pretty much every translation you're looking at – they all have “greatest” – is wrong. What's the difference? The difference is that none of them is making the claim to be the *greatest*, but at least some of them, and likely all of them, are making the claim to a certain *degree* of greatness,

It means that they are probably comparing themselves to the others in the group. They are all men, and it's what men especially do, anytime there is any occasion for any sort of competition; they want to be better, stronger, faster, or smarter, than the rest of the group. You see it all the time in congregations and individual Christians, and in Lutherans Pastors who try to “out Luther Luther.”

Do we imagine that these men are tooting the horns of the other men, or their own? If they are humble Christians, then they are pointing out the greatness of the Christianity of each other, but if that were the case, then what would they have to be embarrassed about? Much more likely, each is making the case for himself, and part and parcel of comparison is to criticize the others.

35. And “καὶ καθίσας ἐφώνησεν τοὺς δώδεκα καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς – having sat down, He called the Twelve, and He says to them...” When I teach, I stand. In those days, when the Rabbi sits, it means that He has assumed the teaching position, and that classroom instruction is about to take place. The teacher is about to instruct The Twelve, who were the ones talking like they talked.

The first verb in the sentence, the one that I have translated “called,” if you look at the forty-two other occurrences of the verb “φωνέω – to make a sound,” it is used to describe one calling to another as sort of a summons, like when your mother used to “call” you to come in for supper. The verb also has connotations of a raised voice, like your mother's always was when calling you.

To summarize, the teacher talks to the students using the well-known oxymoron, “Εἴ τις θέλει πρῶτος εἶναι, ἔσται πάντων ἔσχατος καὶ πάντων διάκονος – If anyone wants to be first, he will be last of all, and a servant of all.” Do not agonize over the meaning of that phrase, like many agonize over the meaning of that phrase, but simply call it what it is, an “oxymoron,” and move on.

Perhaps give an example of another oxymoron. Jesus is the subject of the oxymoron. He is the first, but He will become the last, and a servant of all. He has, in fact, just told them that, relating to them the upcoming events that will take place in Jerusalem. To review, Jesus is talking about His Crucifixion and Resurrection, and the Twelve are talking about which of them is greater.

36. And then, in a move that must have driven the Anabaptists nuts, He takes a child, and He uses that child for an object lesson. I am generally against the use of objects that are brought from home, and the use of any objects to teach children under the age of twelve, or thereabouts, because their minds are unable to process the abstract concepts, like Algebra or object lessons.

But for adults, object lessons are often helpful, which why the adults “get more out of those children's sermons than the children do.” Jesus does not bring objects from home, but He often

uses things already there. A few weeks ago, He used spit, and He is constantly using agricultural objects – fields, seeds, vineyards, farmers – to help people better understand what He is teaching.

The Greek language, like the English language, has words other than “child” that more specifically identify the age of a child, but here the noun translated “child” is “παιδίον,” which is the general Greek word for youngsters. We do not know the specific age of the child, and since the neuter form is used in the one noun and two pronouns referring to it, nor do we know the gender.

And then “ἔσθησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν – He placed it in the midst of them.” The verb “placed” indicates location, not posture, and the word does not tell us if the child was sitting or standing or standing on its head. Probably it was not standing on its head. The verb “ἐναγκαλίζομαι” means literally “to take in one’s arms” and it means that He physically embraced or hugged the child.

The picture being painted here is one of these twelve grown men, men who were just now rather full of themselves, in the manner of many, but not all, recent seminary graduates, competing one with another to determine who was a better follower of Jesus than whom, who are now forced to look at and center their attention on none of them, but rather upon this unnamed child.

37. With that visual, “εἶπεν Ὅς ἂν ἐν τῶν τοιούτων παιδίων δέξηται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐμὲ δέχεται – whoever, in any case, should receive one child like this in my name, receives me.” Grammatically, the author pulls out all the stops to emphasize the conditional nature, i.e. that there is the distinct possibility that what He is about to say will not happen, the child will not be received.

That conditional phrase contains the relative pronoun “ὅς – whoever,” then the particle “ἔάν - if,” here used as “a conditional particle expressing possibility, based on a preexisting condition” (biblos.com), and finally the subjunctive (conditional) verb “δέχεται – should receive.” We note that, in fact, not all churches receive the children, but some absolutely refuse to baptize them.

It’s the first time the phrase “- ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι μου – in my name” appears in Mark, but we see it several times right after this; talking about people casting out demons “in your name,” and people doing good works “in my name.” When He talks (41) about those who give a cup of water to the Apostles, “ἐν ὀνόματι ὅτι Χριστοῦ ἐστε – because of the name of Christ,” they will be rewarded.

When He talks about receiving them “in my name” he is talking about the apostles working in the Apostolic Office, and by extension, He is talking about pastors working in the Apostolic Office. He is talking particularly about children being baptized ordinarily by people who hold that Apostolic Office “in the name” of the Triune God. But that doesn’t always happen in all churches.

Nor do all churches allow children to be brought to Jesus in Baptism, and that’s the conditional here, the wild card. St. Augustine was famously not baptized as an infant, and I’m not sure he ever says why. Monica no doubt wanted it, but his pagan father probably forbade it. At any rate, as an adult he famously put off Baptism until he had completed all the sinning he intended to do.

Yet even as he is putting it off for himself into adulthood, he is acknowledging infant Baptism as the standard and norm for Christianity,

What the universal Church holds, not as instituted by councils but as something always held, is most correctly believed to have been handed down by apostolic authority. Since others respond for children, so that the celebration of the sacrament may be complete for them, it is certainly availing to them for their consecration, because they themselves are not able to respond.

Augustine On Baptism, Against the Donatists (4.24.31)

If there were exceptions to that rule before the Reformation, the flood gates were opened after it. When the Lutherans speak in harsh and unequivocal terms against the Anabaptists, they are talking about the ancestors of today's churches who discourage and often absolutely refuse Infant Baptism to children, sometimes until they reach the age of puberty. Why are we silent on this?

He continues, “καὶ ὃς ἂν ἐμὲ δέχῃται, οὐκ ἐμὲ δέχεται ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με – and whoever receives me, receives the One Who Sent Me.” This is taking that idea one step further, using the same conditional sentence structure to remind them from whence He comes, and reminding them that rejection of Him is rejection not of Him, but of “the one who sent me,” i.e., the Father.

Law/Gospel

Death/Resurrection – He dies, and then He rises. We die, and we will rise. See Baptism and Romans 6 for the application of those things to the modern Christian.

Humility/Exaltation – He humbles Himself, even to the cross, and He at His Resurrection (and Ascension) He is exalted. Christians are humbled by the knowledge of their sin, and the suffering that comes with it, and look forward to our final exaltation.

Great/Great – The world has a different view of greatness, and we constantly have that view foisted upon us. True greatness lies in going to heaven for eternity, and living life with that knowledge in the here and now.

Father/Father – Our earthly fathers are imperfect, and love us only imperfectly, and we who are fathers are aware of our own shortcomings. We have a heavenly Father who is holy and perfect, and who loves us so much that He sends the Son to save us, and in Baptism, through Mother Church, attaches us to His Family.

Child/Child – See above, only substitute us as imperfect children, for whom the Perfect Son dies, so that we are reckoned by the Father to be His perfect children.

Sermon Titles

To Die and Live in Jerusalem

Who is Greater?

Ranking the Apostles

Jesus and Children

Are You a Child?

Hymns

Father Welcomes – LSB 605

Jesus Loves the Little Children – Internet

Pick children's songs that the children know, and that the adults also know. If the children know different songs from the songs that the adults learned as children, maybe it's time to take a look at which songs the children are learning; are they Lutheran or are they Reformed?

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Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Mark). IntVarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark.. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, Fundamental Greek Grammar. Concordia Publishing House, 1993

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, A Concordance to the Greek Testament. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html