



place? Then take the last place. Be the servant of all.” He put a child in the middle of the room. Then, cradling the little one in his arms, he said, “Whoever embraces one of these children as I do embraces me, and far more than me—God who sent me.” The Message

### **What It Could Mean?**

“In case Mark’s audience has failed as miserably as the Twelve to get the point, the same scheme unfolds in Chapter 10: prediction (verses 33-34), misunderstanding (verses 35-39a), readjustment (verses 39b-45).

Why this repetition? Two reasons. First: Discipleship in Mark is hard to accept. Second: In this Gospel Jesus’ closest followers are so dense that light bends around them. Both themes pervade Mark 9:30-37.

“But they did not understand [Jesus’] saying [in 9:31], and they were afraid to ask him” (9:32). What’s not to understand? Jesus has already said much the same in 8:33-38. But the Twelve in Mark’s Gospel never understand Jesus (4:13; 6:52; 8:17, 21). In fact, the last words uttered by Peter, last of the twelve hangers-on, is, “I neither know nor understand what you mean” (14:66). Those with faith in Jesus have nothing to fear (4:40-41; 5:33-34, 36), but not once does Mark ever attribute faith to the Twelve (compare the usually nameless nobodies in 2:5; 5:34; 9:24; 10:52).

Immediately after Jesus has reminded them of his impending humiliation, his followers are shamed to silence: they’ve been quarreling over which of them is tops in their own pecking order (9:33-34). Given antiquity’s preoccupation with social status—not so very distant from our own—that debate is predictable. But in Mark’s context, it’s nonsensical, since Jesus is superior to them all. Disregarding the General, these foot soldiers bicker over their respective ranks.

Like self-sacrifice for the gospel’s sake in 8:34-35, these qualifications for acceptance in 9:37 are important, steering

interpretation away from sentimentality: the “last of all and servant of all” (verse 35) is received “in my name” as a disciple of Jesus who evinces the teacher’s own belittlement by betrayal (9:31). Welcoming such an ambassador of Jesus is tantamount to receiving Jesus, who himself is a mediating emissary of the one who has sent him (9:37; see also Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 12:44-45; 13:20).

Children will return in Mark as exemplary of discipleship (10:13-16), but the stress in 9:33-37 is different. Here Mark concentrates our attention, not on the child’s receptivity (compare 10:15), but on the necessity of a disciple’s welcoming other children in Jesus’ name. That’s the positive counterpoint of both Jesus’ rejection, emphasized in 9:31, and the Twelve’s aspersions cast on one another. In other words, the top-to-bottom reversal of rank in 9:35 realigns how listeners should receive those whom they have mistakenly regarded as beneath them (9:34, 36-37): a detail reiterated in 9:38-41 and developed in next Sunday’s Gospel lection.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by C. Clifton Black*)

### **Readings for Further Study**

- [1 Corinthians 15:9/Ephesians 3:8/1 Timothy 1: 15](#) *Apostle Paul: “I am the least of the apostles”*
- [Galatians 5:13/1 Peter 4: 10 & 11](#) *“through love serve one another”*

### **Thought for the Day**

“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, its thinking of yourself less.” ~ C. S. Lewis

### **A Prayer**

O Father, give us the humility which realizes its ignorance, admits its mistakes, recognizes its need, welcomes advice, accepts rebuke. Help us always to praise rather than to criticize, to sympathize rather than to discourage, to build rather than to destroy, and to think of people at their best rather than at their worst. This we ask for thy name’s sake. **Amen.**