

THE ANNOYING ONE
Mark 9:30-37
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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Good people, really good people, have a way of annoying the rest of us. What do I mean by annoying us? Good people not only have high ethical standards they also have authentic humility. Good people are compassionate and hunger for justice. They don't stand by and do nothing they risk themselves to right wrongs and help people who can't help themselves. Good people are truth-tellers and put our feet to the fire. Good people strive to be Christ-like.

Whenever people are moved to be Christ-like we tend to get our hackles up because, through them, Christ gets in our way. Our behaviors and the motives behind our behaviors are questioned and exposed. When that happens we have one of two choices. We can either repent or we can vent. If our conscious is convicted we can change our ways. If not, we can get annoyed and behave even more badly.

We see this happening in the Gospels. Whenever Jesus confronted people behaving badly they either asked for forgiveness and followed him or they got insulted and conspired to kill him. Jesus knew what was coming during the last stages of his public ministry. By that time he annoyed the wrong people once too often.

In today's reading for the second time Jesus warned the twelve he would be handed over to the religious leaders and they would hand him over to the Romans and they would crucify him. He also told the disciples in three days he would rise again, but they didn't hear that part. They were too fixated on the prediction of his arrest and execution.

The first time Jesus gave this warning Peter had just declared Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of the Living God. Jesus felt blessed and he responded by affirming Peter with a blessing. But when Jesus followed up with the predictions of his death on the cross Peter in turn rebuked Jesus for talking nonsense.

Can we blame Peter? I don't think so. Ever since he was a boy it was drummed into his little head the Anointed One, the Messiah, would rescue God's people from tyranny and establish his everlasting Kingdom. He would be a conquering messiah, blasting God's enemies and cleansing the earth of moral decay. The people of Israel would be vindicated. Their exile and humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles which included the Romans, the Greeks, the Persians and Babylonians, would end. God's people would have the last laugh.

Isn't this the type of Messiah we want? Someone to blast our enemies and vindicate us is what we're waiting for. But we sometimes forget that Christ came to annoy us too. We still have some growing up to do before we can become disciples fit for the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus had his second conversation about his death with Peter and the rest, they were at Capernaum staying in a house. Mark used that term "in the house" several times in his Gospel. Whose house was it? Knowing that isn't important. All we need to know is this house was a place for the disciples to rest and be together with Jesus. In the house Jesus talked to them, trying to get them to reinterpret their traditional perceptions of who the Messiah was supposed to be and who God's people are suppose to be.

To get the conversation rolling, Jesus began with a question. "What were you guys arguing about on the road?"

Silence, they didn't answer because they were caught off guard. Since Jesus told them he was going to die soon, naturally they started debating which one of them would step up and take his place.

Notice how Jesus had to ask them what they were talking about. Apparently after Jesus started talking crazy about his death the disciples began to distance themselves from Jesus, figuratively and literally. It wasn't fun talking with Jesus anymore, so they lagged behind as Jesus forged ahead on the road to Jerusalem. At this critical time when Jesus needed their friendship and support they retreated into themselves.

Be honest, if you and I were there, we'd probably do the same. It's hard sticking it out with someone facing hardship, so we choose to get lost in our delusions instead because it takes courage facing reality.

So for their own good, to bring them back to reality, Jesus became annoying. Knowing each one of them claimed to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God, Jesus forced them to face the truth.

"If you want to be first, you must put yourself last. You must become the servant of all."

This is what Bible scholars call one of Jesus' hard sayings. The Kingdom of God is the polar opposite of the world system. In the world we are taught to claw our way to the top and outshine everyone else. We first learn this lesson in childhood. Then we grow up thinking we deserve to be at the center of attention with family, friends and neighbors orbiting around us. To maintain this equilibrium in some situations, not all but often enough we try to dominate and manipulate the people and events to our satisfaction.

Jesus needed his disciples, the future leaders of his Church and the guardians of his legacy to unlearn their old ways and relearn what he preached from the beginning of his public ministry.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He sent me to proclaim
release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of
the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)*

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were painfully honest in their appraisals of Jesus' twelve disciples. We see them at their best and worst.

There's a reason for this transparency. We need to know for our own good the twelve disciples were just as fallible as we are. They could be jealous, cowardly and selfish. But Jesus saw good in them hidden under their flaws. Why else would he choose them to be guardians of his legacy? Jesus sensed they were teachable, with the potential to repent and be changed. But with the process of transformation there would be horrendous growing pains.

The primary job of a disciple in Judea at the time was to get to know the rabbi and become just like him. That explains why disciples would live and travel with their rabbis. They not only learned how to think like their rabbi but to live like their rabbi. When the time came the disciple would branch off and become his own rabbi and gather his own disciples around him. This was how the faith was handed down from one generation to the next.

After Jesus spilled the beans about his crucifixion his disciples had a hard time readjusting themselves to Jesus' sacrificial servant lifestyle because it was so radical. His one saying, "If you want to come after me you must first deny yourself before you can pick up your cross and follow me," should have scared them off right away but it didn't, probably for the same reason we aren't scared off when Jesus is quoted in Bible studies and worship services. We hear it so often we don't take it seriously until we're ready to take it seriously.

When are we willing to take his call to discipleship seriously? When we really get to know him. Remember that was the primary task of a disciple getting to know his rabbi by staying with him, watching him and listening to him so he could become just like him.

It was true back then and it's true today. Our job, my job is to get to know Jesus intimately. You might think the twelve had the advantage. They lived in the same decade as Jesus. He personally sought them out and chose them. They were with him almost twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Often I hear Christians say how much better it would be if Jesus was alive today so we could see, hear and touch him.

But Jesus is alive today, as much as he was two thousand years ago. Easter morning makes it possible. Through his risen presence and the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus is present in the Church, the Body of Christ. When we gather in "the house" Mark wrote about, when two

or more are gathered in his name for prayer, scripture reading and worship, Christ is present in each of us and Jesus speaks to us through us as long as we are grounded in God's word. That's also when the Holy Spirit comes to empower us, equips us and entrusts us to be this generation's guardians of Christ's legacy, the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

So be assured, you can get to know Jesus as much as the twelve disciples if you make the time to come together to help each other become active guardians of his legacy. You see, through Christ we are anointed to bring good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives. That's why you were called to be a disciple and why you were called to membership in this beloved community. You are here to get to know Jesus and then go out into the world to tell others, by your words and deeds the liberating reality of the Gospel.

For the next eight weeks I encourage you to make the time to come together sometimes in small groups, other times with your new prayer partner and sometimes in a large group. Using Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven Life" we can rediscover our purpose in life. Loving God and following Jesus into the Kingdom is why you were born. You were also born to love God by walking with your neighbor as a friend and helper. That is why Babcock Church was born in this neighborhood.

I admit, by accepting this invite you will be inconvenienced, you may have to miss The Voice or America's God Talent. And you may be annoyed by me and others to get involved and learn what it means to be a disciple, denying yourself, picking up your own cross and following Jesus to wherever he takes us. But you shouldn't be annoyed with me or the other New Beginning Leaders. Be annoyed by the Annoying One, Jesus, and in time you'll be glad you did.