

**[1]**  
**How to Be Great**  
**Mark 9:33-37**  
**June 12, 2016, Jeff Germs**

We are continuing on with our *Encounters with Jesus* series. Last week we took a look at an encounter Jesus had with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. And we saw how Nicodemus changed through his encounters with Jesus. He started out as an undercover seeker of Jesus for fear of his other colleagues in the religious system who hated Jesus because he was threatening their tradition. Nick went to Jesus with a heart that was truly seeking answers. We connected the dots in his life and saw a transition in Nicodemus as he went from being undercover, living in fear and walking in darkness, to stepping completely out of the darkness and to follow Jesus wholeheartedly into the light. It's a truly inspirational story.

Today we are going to step into another encounter with Jesus. This one is one of the many he had with his disciples. I love seeing how Jesus mentored his apprentices. He took every opportunity as a chance to help them mature. Every obstacle, every failure or misstep, every conflict were seen, in Jesus' eyes, as opportunities to grow. The encounter we are going to dig into today is one of those grow opps.

**[2]**

**Mark 9:33–37 (NLT)**

***<sup>33</sup>After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you discussing out on the road?” <sup>34</sup>But they didn’t answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.***

**[3]**

***<sup>35</sup>He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, “Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.” <sup>36</sup>Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>“Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me.”***

Let's walk through the passage.

**[4]**

***<sup>33</sup>After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house,...***

Now, the house they got settled in is, again, likely the same house they were in when the paralytic man was lowered through its ceiling, which was probably Peter's home. So, they have just come from a long journey. Let's go back a bit and see where they came from because it has bearing on this encounter.

In order to really discover the context you need to read from all three of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke and try to harmonize the events. In Matthew 16 we

see Jesus with his apprentices at Caesarea Philippi. This is where Jesus asks his disciples who people say he is.

[5]

**Matthew 16:14 (NLT)**

***14 “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”***

Then Jesus said, “So, what about you? Who do you say I am?” Peter pipes up first and answers correctly.

[6]

***“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”***

And then Jesus praises Peter for his answer.

[7]

**Matthew 16:17–19 (NLT)**

***17 Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. 18 Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.***

[8]

***19 And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”***

So, Peter is feeling pretty good about himself. Jesus has just praised him in front of the whole group and it seems like he is given some special privileges that set him apart from the others.

Immediately after this, Jesus pulls aside the three disciples in his inner circle, Peter, James and John and he takes them on a hike up some high mountain where they will have a very special experience with Jesus.

While on the summit of the mountain, as the disciples watched, Jesus’ body was transformed. He started to glow. The Bible says “***his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.***” And then, of all things, Moses and Elijah, who had both been dead for centuries, appeared. The disciples are all pretty excited about this, especially Peter.

Then Jesus tells them to keep quiet about what they just saw until after he has been resurrected from the dead. So, he gives these three an experience that they are not to share with anyone. They are feeling pretty special.

After they get down the mountain they rejoin the other disciples who are engaged in an argument with some people. Jesus asks them what is going on and a man told him that

he took his demon possessed boy to the disciples to be healed and they couldn't do it, hence the argument. Jesus decisively casts the demon out of the boy and restores him to his father while all the disciples watch.

I wonder how the disciples felt about themselves after that failure. And I wonder what Peter, James and John were thinking, about themselves after their mountain top experience with Jesus, and about the other disciples who couldn't cast out the demon.

Of course, we can only guess, but I would imagine, if past experience is an indicator, their thoughts were not completely mature. The three were probably feeling smug while the others were feeling demoralized.

Immediately after this, Jesus predicts his death.

**[9]**

**Mark 9:30–32 (NLT)**

***<sup>30</sup> Leaving that region, they traveled through Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know he was there, <sup>31</sup> for he wanted to spend more time with his disciples and teach them. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead." <sup>32</sup> They didn't understand what he was saying, however, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.***

So, Jesus has just told them that he is going to be killed. This is not the first time he has revealed this to them. They didn't ask him to clarify what he meant, but you can bet their heads were spinning trying to figure it out. I wonder what they were thinking, because it was immediately after this that the encounter we are focused on this morning occurred.

They walk to Capernaum. They get settled in Peter's house after a long journey and Jesus asks them a question.

**[10]**

**Mark 9:33–37 (NLT)**

***"What were you discussing out on the road?" <sup>34</sup>But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.***

Now this is just bizarre. It's a very sadly funny situation. Can you picture it in your mind? Jesus is walking ahead of his apprentices as they follow him to Capernaum and they are arguing about which one of them is the greatest. I wonder what the argument sounded like.

This is just a wild guess, but in my mind I can see Peter being the ring leader reminding the others about how he had given Jesus the right answer about who he was at Caesarea Philippi and how he was one of the privileged three to witness Jesus being transformed on the mountain; "and while we were there Jesus introduced us to Moses

and Elijah. Oh, and keep that to yourselves because Jesus told us not to tell anyone, even you guys.”

And then, I can imagine Peter bringing up the other disciples’ failed attempt at casting out the demon and, “Well, if I had been there, I certainly could have done it. After all, I get some pretty privileged power from on high.”

And then I wonder if the conversation turned to what Jesus told them about his impending death. There would be a leadership vacuum. Who among the twelve should Jesus put in charge?

**“So, fellas,”** Jesus asked them after getting settled in Peter’s house in Capernaum, **“What were you discussing out on the road?”** You gotta put yourself into this situation. Imagine the awkward smiles on the faces of the disciples as they are trying to figure out how to answer Jesus. Their eyes darting back and forth at each other wondering what to say and who should say it. And for the first time, not even Peter opens his mouth. They are all caught with their hands in the cookie jar acting extremely childish.

***34 But they didn’t answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.***

Of course they didn’t answer. They knew they were being childish. “Oh, we were just discussing which one of us was the greatest.” Of course they are not going to say that.

Now, Jesus, being the most amazing mentor to ever live, senses another grow opp.

**[11]**

***35 He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him...***

I love this. He doesn’t point his finger at them and shame them. He doesn’t humiliate them. He sits down. Sitting was the posture a rabbi would take for teaching. So, Jesus, the rabbi, sits down and calls his apprentices over to him.

They gather around, knowing he knows their secret, and that they are going to learn a deep lesson from him.

**[12]**

***35 ...and said, “Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.”***

God has given each of us a desire to have significance. That is a healthy desire God placed in us at creation when he stamped his image in Adam and Eve and gave them something to do. Take care of the earth and everything in it. Be stewards of it.

We gain significance from doing the thing God created us to do. Since the fall, though, that desire for significance has been twisted so the way we feel good about ourselves or justify our existence is to rise above others. I realize this is a great over generalization,

but we tend to feel best about ourselves when we are better than someone else at something. How many of us feel good about ourselves when we loose at something? I don't.

If I get a "B" and you get an "A" I need to find someone who got a "C" to feel better about myself so I know there are people worse than me. It's pretty crazy, but I think we all carry a bit of that thinking.

**[13]**

**We think we need to justify our existence by our performance.** The big problem with that kind of thinking, of course, is that it gets in the way of relationship. It keeps us from being real. We feel the need to cover up and wear a mask, and play act and pretend, which is the exact definition of a 'hypocrite,' which is what Jesus called the Pharisees. We are never satisfied to just live in the now with what God has given us.

**[14]**

So, Jesus said **the antidote to this kind of twisted thinking is to lower yourself and serve**, which paradoxically does the opposite of what we think. It actually raises us up.

***"Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else."***

You want to be first? Take the posture of a servant. Then Jesus further illustrated this.

**[15]**

***<sup>36</sup>Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>"Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me."***

This is such a beautiful scene.

Matthew's account includes similar words, but then adds,

**[16]**

**Matthew 18:3-4 (NLT)**

***<sup>3</sup>Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. <sup>4</sup> So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

Notice Jesus couples becoming like little children with turning from our sins. Jesus is not saying we should act like little children. If we act like little children without turning from our sin, it's not cool. We have all seen grown adults act like little children at times. And truth be told, we have all probably pathetically acted like little children. There are some ways it's good to be like little children and there are others ways it's not good to be like little children.

There are some childlike attributes we should aspire to. There is a certain time in a child's life when they lose innocent qualities. Ruthie and I couldn't have kids, so we haven't experienced it like many of you have, but we have seen the scary transformation in some kids from a distance, and we have heard parents lament that loss and long for the simpler days when their kids were young and innocent and they knew they were kids.

Young children usually know they need their parents. They are dependant and they know it. They love being with them because they feel safe, if the relationship is a good one. They don't have all the answers, and they know it. They are inquisitive about life and eager to learn and grow. They are at the very bottom of the pecking order and it doesn't bother them, because they don't know it yet. They don't judge others by how they dress, or feel self-conscious about how their parents dress them. You could dress them in a monkey suit and take them out in public and they wouldn't feel the least bit self-conscious. As a matter of fact they would feel special cause *they* have a monkey suit.

At a certain stage of development things change. We start to get self-conscious, self-indulgent, and just plain self-ish. These are the qualities Jesus wants to purge from us and the other child-like qualities, such as humility, he wants to grow in us.

So, Jesus takes one of these little children in his arms and lovingly holds her as a living object lesson and says, essentially, "If you want to be great in God's kingdom you need to do the opposite to what comes naturally. Instead of clawing your way to the top and thinking you need to rise above others in order to feel significant, you need to actually lower yourself and take the position of a servant."

[17]

**That is the way of God's kingdom kind of life. It is counterintuitive. The way up is down. Those who humble themselves will be exalted. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled.**

Just before Jesus was arrested he gave his disciples another living object lesson of what this looks like. It was just before the last meal he would eat together with his disciples.

[18]

**John 13:1–17 (NLT)**

***<sup>1</sup> Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. <sup>2</sup> It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.***

[19]

***<sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. <sup>4</sup> So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, <sup>5</sup> and poured water into a basin.***

**Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.**

**[20]**

**<sup>6</sup> When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will." <sup>8</sup> "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."**

**[21]**

**<sup>9</sup> Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!" <sup>10</sup> Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." <sup>11</sup> For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."**

**[22]**

**<sup>12</sup> After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? <sup>13</sup> You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. <sup>14</sup> And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet.**

**[23]**

**<sup>15</sup> I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.**

Do you see what has just happened here? Jesus had just spent three years with his apprentices. He had been preparing them for continuing his work once he was gone and left the Holy Spirit with them. He has seen them jostling for power and position. He has seen them argue about who is the greatest after sensing a leadership opportunity when they see that his position is going to soon be vacant. James and John and their mother went to Jesus, after hearing Jesus predict his death and resurrection, to see if they could have the best positions with him in his kingdom.

If I was Jesus I would have taken a look at this team I had been developing for the last three years and given up. He doesn't do that. Instead, he makes some very deliberate moves to teach them what greatness looks like in his kingdom. The clock is ticking. How in the world would they be ready to take over what he had started. Hours before he would be arrested, just before they would have their last meal together,

John says in verse 3 of John 13,

**[24]**

**<sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God.**

Jesus knew who he was. He knew where he was going. He had nothing to prove. He didn't need to justify his existence, so he takes the position of the lowliest servant and washes his disciples feet, and then he said they need to do the same. That is where the

blessing of God comes from. It doesn't come from clawing and clamouring to be on top. It comes from giving to and serving others.

I see that happening so much at CRBC. We've said over and over again that we have a very high percentage of people in our congregation serving in various ways. I don't see you jostling for position. I don't see anyone saying, "Hey look at me." I see you lovingly serving and sacrificially giving to see God's kingdom established in Campbell River.

There are over one hundred people serving in Children's Ministry alone. There are dozens serving in Youth Ministry, Growth Groups, Women's Ministry, Worship, Hospitality, Welcome Team, Outreach, Seniors' Ministry, Facilities and Maintenance, Freedom Session, your church board, and so much more.

I wish there was a really good way to thank you. You are truly our heroes. Today the staff want to show our appreciation and thank you by serving you at our Volunteer Appreciation BBQ. We would like you all to be there with us. We could not do what we do without you. We continually thank God for you. I am Hoping you will all come.

In closing I would like to read something that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church, thanking them for their partnership in the Gospel. This is from us to you.

[25]

**Philippians 1:3–11 (NLT)**

***<sup>3</sup> Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. <sup>4</sup> Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, <sup>5</sup> for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. <sup>6</sup> And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.***

[26]

***<sup>7</sup> So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. <sup>8</sup> God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.***

[27]

***<sup>9</sup> I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. <sup>10</sup> For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. <sup>11</sup> May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.***





**Encounters with Jesus**  
**How to be Great**  
**Mark 9:33-37**  
**Week of June 12, 2016**

**Objective of this study:** To see how the way Jesus calls us is counterintuitive to how we normally think and live. The way to true greatness is to lower ourselves and serve.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 8** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

**Welcome**

What is the worst job you've had, or task you've had to do and why?

**Word/Work (45 - 90 minutes)**

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Break up into pairs or smaller groups and divide up the following passages: Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 16:13-28; 17:1-23; 18:1-6; John 13:1-17. What do each of these passages say about heart attitude, leadership, serving, discipleship, greatness etc. Regroup and share your findings.

**Sermon Quote:** "Jesus knew who he was. He knew where he was going. He had nothing to prove. He didn't need to justify his existence, so he takes the position of the lowliest servant and washes his disciples feet, and then he said they need to do the same. That is where the blessing of God comes from. It doesn't come from clawing to be on top. It comes from giving to and serving others."

3. Take the remaining time and share where you are in your spiritual journey in regards to learning these principles. Be honest. Do you feel stuck, afraid, insecure, threatened?
4. Pray for each other in pairs.

Have a great summer. Make sure you have a BBQ or two with your group. Fellowship and share in each others' lives. Continue growing and looking around to see what Jesus is doing and join him. We look forward to hearing your stories.