

Semicontinuous
Prov. 31:10–31
Ps. 1

Complementary
Wis. 1:16–2:1, 12–22
or Jer. 11:18–20
Ps. 54

Jas. 3:13–4:3, 7–8a
Mark 9:30–37

First and Last

Goal for the Session

Adults will examine Jesus' passion prediction and teachings about discipleship and then identify ways to be "last of all and servant of all."

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 9:30–37

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Sharon H. Ringe

Mark 9:30–32 forecasts Jesus' fate. Mark 9:33–37 spins out consequences for the disciples' lifestyle. Together these teachings grant the premise underlying the disciples' confusion: the disciples' lives will mirror the one to whom they are committed. Instead of leaping immediately to examples of Jesus' glory and power as their models, however, they need to recognize that Jesus is first and foremost anointed to suffer at the hands of the world's powers. In accepting such a life contrary to the world's wisdom, they will share in the resurrection that is God's final word on Jesus' life.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Martha L. Moore-Keish

Jesus first calls the disciples to emulate the child, thus renouncing social status; he then calls them to welcome the child, to make space for those with no social status, since to do so is to welcome Jesus himself—and the One who sent him. According to this story, a child enables God to be known as one who overturns social hierarchies, welcoming the lowly into God's embrace. The "gift of children" is thus not only about the delight and wonder that children embody, but also about the way that children draw Jesus' followers into resisting all imperial powers of our time, struggling against all that opposes the "kin-dom of God."

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Harry B. Adams

It can be noted that the word of Jesus comes as a liberating word rather than an onerous demand. There was a pathos about the man who was so concerned about where he sat at the head table that he would take it upon himself to change the place cards. It is sad for a person to be so consumed with what others think about him, to be so insecure in who he is that he must seek public recognition of his importance. We are truly significant when we welcome Jesus in the child who finds comfort and aid and security in the arms in which we enfold her.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Nathan G. Jennings

This text has some obvious implications for the lives of Christian disciples trying to live in community with one another. This is one of many Gospel texts that show that leadership and authority among the Christian community is based upon service and humility. The disciples have trouble understanding Christ's teaching about being Messiah, and directly following this, he shows them that leadership in the community is like receiving a child. One obvious literal ramification of the text would be to ask, how does our congregation minister to children? Next would follow questions based upon the analogy of children to other people who are vulnerable or low in social status: the marginalized, the poor, other races.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 9:30–37

Focus on Your Teaching

Our world defines success in terms of how much money and social status one achieves. From childhood we are encouraged, prodded, and pushed to get ahead. Unfortunately, this often can mean achieving success at others' expense. While such motivation is not bad in itself, it is easy to lose perspective of what is important in life when we are constantly reaching for the next rung on the ladder. In today's focus scripture, Jesus challenges our worldly assumptions. Adults will have the opportunity to reconsider what it means to be first or last.

Guide me, O God, as I seek to be your faithful disciple. May my teaching enable participants to encounter your Word and your lessons for our lives. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- board or newsprint
- markers
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- paper
- pens
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for September 26, 2021

For Responding

- option 1: markers
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheets 1 and 2, pens
- option 3: index cards, pens

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, draw a horizontal line on a board or newsprint and label the far left side “Last” and the far right side “First.” For option 2 in Responding, be prepared to have some information about ways your congregation already ministers to marginalized groups of people.

Welcome participants as they arrive. If participants used option 3 in Responding in the previous session, invite surveyors to tell about responses they received to the question, “Who do you say that Jesus is?”

Form pairs and have participants tell one another about an experience when they were undeservedly elevated above other people in their midst or when they were undeservedly humbled before their peers. Discuss what, if anything, they learned about social status from the experience.

Gather participants and tell them today's session explores what Jesus taught his disciples about social status and servanthood.

Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

Holy God, we gather as Jesus' disciples to understand his teachings. May we reflect his teachings in our daily living. Amen.

EXPLORING

Have a volunteer read Mark 9:30–37. Remind participants that last week they read one of Jesus' passion predictions. Today's session begins with a second. Invite a volunteer to read Mark 8:31–33 and Mark 9:30–32. Have participants listen for similarities and differences

Mark has Jesus predict his suffering and death three times (see 8:31–33, 9:30–32, and 10:32–34). These reveal a growing understanding that Jesus defied people’s expectation of God’s Messiah. Instead of earthly warrior king, Jesus is suffering servant.

Mark places the disciples’ argument about being the greatest immediately after Jesus reveals his own betrayal, death, and rising. Such placement contrasts Jesus’ suffering and self-sacrifice with his followers’ very human desire for greatness.

between the two passion predictions. Compare the two passages. Ask:

- ✪ To whom is Jesus speaking when he makes his passion predictions?
- ✪ Who does Jesus say will betray him?
- ✪ How do Jesus’ disciples respond to what he is telling them?
- ✪ Are the disciples able to understand Jesus’ prediction when he speaks in chapter 9? Why or why not?

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 9:30–37) and read the “What?” excerpt. Ask: If you were a disciple hearing Jesus’ second passion prediction, what was becoming clearer about your own future?

Call attention to verses 33–35. As a group, determine the status placement for people from Jesus’ time: Roman authorities, religious leaders, men, women, children, Jesus, disciples. Have a volunteer write the different people on the continuum line on the board, indicating where each would stand, socially, between “first” and “last”. Then show what Jesus did by switching the labels “last” and “first.” Ask:

- ✪ What would this change in status mean for each of these people?
- ✪ How might religious leaders have reacted to Jesus’ words?
- ✪ How might disciples have reacted?

Read the “Where?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Form small groups and distribute paper and pens. Working in groups, tell participants to pretend they are living in Jesus’ community and understand his call to renounce social status. Have them write a short description of the “gift of children” to the “kin-dom of God.” Gather participants to read aloud their descriptions.

Transition to Responding by reading the “So What?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Discuss:

- ✪ How does your church treat children?
- ✪ Does your community resemble what you wrote in the previous activity about the gift of children? How so?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. **Status Reversal** This activity challenges adults to consider the effect status reversal would have on people today. Refer to the continuum line in Exploring. Have participants name groups in modern society who represent varying social status, such as waste collector and banker. Write the different names on the continuum line, then switch the labels “last” and “first” on the board or newsprint. Ask:
 - ✪ What would this change in status mean for each of these people today?
 - ✪ What might such a change in status mean for you?
 - ✪ What might it look like for today’s disciples to be the last and servant of all?

Challenge each person to think of one example from his or her life for each of the following: a time when they are “first,” a time when they are a servant of all. Form pairs

**EASY
PREP**

and have them tell one another about their examples. Have them discuss how to live as a servant of all. Have each pair make a plan to hold one another accountable for living in this way.

- 2. The Least of These** This activity has participants identifying ways their congregation ministers to “the least of these” and invites them to commit themselves to at least one activity of service. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 and read the “Now What?” excerpt. Invite participants to name those in your community who are vulnerable or of low social status.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Least of These) and pens. Have participants follow the directions and work alone. When they have completed the activity, gather participants to discuss your church’s programs with children or other marginalized groups. Ask:

- ✧ How are you involved or how do you support these programs?
- ✧ What one service will you commit to do to serve “the least of these”?

- 3. Everyday Servants** This activity encourages adults to consider the ways they serve Jesus in their daily lives. Distribute index cards and pens. Have participants list on separate lines the different venues where they live their lives such as church, work, home, school, in a club, on a team, as a volunteer, and so on.

Give time for personal reflection and encourage participants to note briefly how they are or how they can be a servant in each of these venues. Challenge them to commit to one act of servanthood in the week ahead. Mark this activity on their list or write it on the back of their card. Save the cards to use during Closing.

CLOSING

In light of today’s activities, have participants think about the experience(s) they discussed in Gathering. Discuss:

- ✧ How differently do you look at that experience now?
- ✧ What have you learned about status and Christian discipleship from this passage and discussion?

If you used option 3 in Responding, invite individuals to read aloud from their index cards a commitment for the week ahead.

Offer this prayer:

Help us, O God, to be better servants of your children, welcoming and serving all. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for September 26, 2021, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

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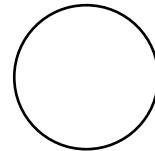
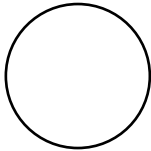
September 19, 2021
First and Last

Adult
Resource Sheet 2

The Least of These

Directions: In the smaller circles, see the people from the focus scripture who are considered to be among “the least of these.” In the blank circles, write categories or conditions of people in your community who may also be considered among “the least of these.” Outside the circles, list any activities your congregation does to serve these groups. Select one circle on the page and commit to providing a service to (or with) that group. Write your commitment on this sheet.

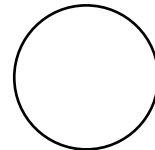
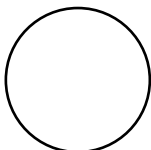
children



hungry

Jesus

poor



widows