Mark 9:37 “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes not just me but also him who sent me.”

In order to grasp the wonder of this text it might just be that we are going to have to talk about some of the events that have just recently taken place in the life of Jesus and the disciples. Here is the first thing to know. We are basically in the final year of Jesus ministry. For that matter, we are not that far into the final year of Jesus ministry. It is for that reason that you find Jesus, even in our text, plainly teaching about what is going to come. The reaction to that, and the whole of what is going, is really the point of the lesson that is before us today. Let’s learn some more.

The last ten specific miracles of Jesus recorded for us are: the healing of the mute man a miracle that everyone remarked had never been done before. Following that miracle Jesus then sends out his disciples for their first foray into the preaching and teaching ministry. Remember that his disciples were given the ability to do miracles themselves. When the disciples return, that’s when it is learned that John the Baptist has been beheaded. Jesus seeks to take his disciples away to a quiet place. That results in the large crowd in the wilderness and the feeding of the 5,000. Next comes Jesus walking on water (not to mention Peter’s brief walk too). All of this causes the discussion of Jesus as the bread of life and the desertion of many of those who follow Jesus. At this point Jesus is still working at having lots of private time with the disciples that he might teach them what is coming.

Next is Jesus healing the Canaanite woman’s daughter of severe demon possession without even seeing the daughter, but just by pronouncing the girl is healed. As we heard recently in the Gospel reading, now comes the healing of the deaf and mute man. Again Jesus tries to get his disciples alone to teach them privately. That results in the feeding of the 4,000. Next the blind man of Bethsaida is healed. Here is an important thing to note. Again as Jesus is trying to get his disciples alone to teach them what is to come we find the wonderful and awesome confession of Peter and really the rest of the disciples, that they believe **“You are the Christ!”** Again, remember that Jesus once more teaches them about the things that are to come.

The next miracle is seen by only three disciples but what a serious impact it must have had on them. That is the Transfiguration of Jesus. Three of the disciples actually saw the glory, the majesty, and the complete awesomeness that Jesus truly is. I am pretty sure, even though they are told not to tell anyone, that they shared their experience with the other disciples. Now comes the healing of the boy with the demon, the demon that the disciples could not take care of, but Jesus does. The disciples ask why they couldn’t and Jesus tells them: **“Because of your little faith.”**

We have now come to the events of our text. When you look at the events of our text the incredibility of what happens should strike you as absolute foolishness, but I will be kinder and I will simply say, it is not so much foolishness as it is the folly of being human. And it is exactly that point that I believe is the reason we are given these words and this section of the history of Jesus. Because in truth, in order to be a believer in Jesus, well, you have to put aside, cast off, and reject the human side of things. Or theme will be: **CONTEMPLATIONS ON FAITH!**

Now, our text actually starts out simply enough but in truth it is a bit more complicated than it seems. Here is what we are told, **“They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know this, because he was teaching his disciples. He told them, “The Son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill him. But three days after he is killed, he will rise.”**  Hey guys, here is what is going to happen. Here is what you can expect in a few months from now. I am telling you as clearly and precisely as I can for your sake. Jesus wants them ready, prepared, strengthened and in the know for what is coming!

People, this is not the first time he has spoken of this. As you follow the Scripture it is clear that Jesus has already spoken of these same things. Do you remember the first time? That is when Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him for saying these things. Remember, this rebuking of Peter was right after Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, actually all the disciples had agree with this confession. With these words they are acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah promised of God, come to save the world.

Now I have to tell you that the incident with Peter the first time is something that has always made my head totally spin in disbelief. Disbelief at Peter. You have just confessed that you believe Jesus to be the Son of God, the promised Messiah of your centuries old Bible that forms the heart of your faith. In the first two years of Jesus’ ministry you have been shown time and time again the incredible ignorance you have concerning God’s Word and what it is all about, but now, in this third year, you have become convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and you clearly, along with the others, say so.

What would you call this rebuke of Peter? Ignorance? Arrogance? Unbelief? Seriously I wrestle with this. Peter had just confessed that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and here is Peter telling Jesus, the Son of God that he was foolish, confused, dippy…Peter is telling Jesus he is mistaken! I’m sorry, that just doesn’t add up in my head. If you believe Jesus is God, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world then why would you question him, doubt him, in truth, disbelieve him? That is not faith! Jesus tells Peter he is actually speaking from Satan! Peter is uttering evil and falsehood! Peter is so wrong that is off the scale of wrongs. And this right after a confession of faith! That does tell us something about faith.

Either faith is or it isn’t. You can’t in one minute say, “I believe” and then act “I don’t believe.” That’s not faith. That is evil, as Jesus points out. That is unbelief! That is hypocrisy at its best. But I fear that each and every one of us has been guilty of the very same thing! “I believe Jesus is the Son of God…but I don’t believe he can tell me what to do, or I don’t believe his Word is God’s Word, or “I don’t believe God is working for my good!” In other words, you confess Jesus is your God and Lord but you don’t act like He is God and Lord. People, that is not faith!

Look at what is said next in our instance of Jesus telling them what is coming. **“But they did not understand the statement and were afraid to ask him about it.”** Again marvel at what is going on here. You have before you the Son of God, wisdom itself, and you don’t seek his knowledge, you don’t have him clarify? You didn’t understand and you don’t ask questions to learn? Notice that in this case it is caused by fear. True, Jesus suffering and dying is scary, but Jesus said he was going to rise from the dead. He was coming back to life. For you to be afraid means that either you don’t believe Jesus or you didn’t really listen to what Jesus said. Here is another fact of faith. Faith listens to Jesus. Faith treasures the word of God, digs into the word of God, works at grasping and understanding the word of God. What is caused when you don’t listen, when you don’t have faith and when you don’t treasure the Word! Fear! We become afraid and in fear we end up cowering in ignorance. Clearly an example of what faith is not to be! Faith is not filled with fear and a willingness to stay ignorant of God’s truth!

Look what happens next. **“They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they remained silent, because on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.”** Again let this lesson sink in especially in regard of what it says of faith. They were arguing about who was the greatest? Do you know who is the greatest? The disciples missed this truth. Jesus is the greatest. Jesus is all that counts. When you are worried about your position, your honor, your glory, your benefit rather than thinking about serving Jesus, there is a problem. And what kind of bothers me is that this discussion may have been precipitated by a discussion of the fact that three of them got to see the Transfigured Jesus and the rest did not. So we kind of have Peter, James and John exalting themselves, when in truth all they should have been doing is exalting Jesus. Faith serves God, not self, but they didn’t get that right.

I think sometimes that is our problem. We are busy with ourselves rather than Jesus. We think all the blessings we have are from us rather than from God. Seriously, if I were to examine your finances would I see God as the most important or you? If I were to examine your patterns of life, would I see God as most important or you? And like the disciples, when our sin is pointed out, do we keep silence because we just don’t want to admit or really give up on our foolishness. Now let this sink in, these guys are so low on the “who is better” scale that they can’t even grasp that they are talking to Jesus and he already knew what the argument is about. Jesus wants to loving speak with you about the problem. He knows the problem. But you think by your silence (or absence or whatever is hindering you going to Jesus!!) that Jesus is never going to know. Again, that is not faith.

Now I love how this section ends because so far we have been given examples of what faith is not. Faith is not thinking you know better than God. Faith is not opposing God or ignoring God or being afraid of God. Here is the example Jesus gives.

**“Then he took a little child and placed him in their midst. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes not just me but also him who sent me.”**

This child is a “padaion.” It is a Greek word that covers the period from birth until weaning. In other words this could be a child from birth to up to two years old or so. Note that the EHV properly mentions that the child is “placed” before them, really no mention that the child is standing. And the fact that the child is in the arms of Jesus gives us a good picture of the age of this child. Maybe somewhere around a year or so. This child is not going to preach, teach, share knowledge or wow you with feats of strength. This child is still working on some sort of vocabulary and maybe can already grasp Momma and Daddy but not because the child recognizes that this is my mother who gave me birth or the dad who sired me. The child only grasps “This is the person who takes care of me, loves me and watches over me. One I call Momma and one I call Daddy.” That’s it. Not a lot going on upstairs in terms of absolute knowledge but that child is a total sponge of learning. This is the child that Jesus points to as the epitome of the action of faith. Faith welcomes the child. Faith loves the child, takes the child in one’s arms. There are no judgments made, no condemnations handed out. There is simple acceptance and love and compassion for this child. This helpless, needs you human, who will die without you. Faith does that. Faith welcomes. Faith clings.

Don’t get confused. This is not where Jesus tells us we are to have faith like a little child, that is a different text and circumstance. This is a lesson for the disciples on faith, but now you have to wrestle with what the lesson is. Context, context, dear people. The disciples were arguing about who was the best, the greatest, the chief, or the hotshot among them. I can guarantee you that the hotshot, the person who considers themselves the “greatest” does not take time for children and all that silliness. Jesus does. Jesus is concerned for the souls, yes, even the youngest of souls around him. So it is with us. We are to be caring, compassionate and loving to all the souls around us for such is the action of faith, one of the fruits of faith.

Put this in the context of our world. What does this say about the person who thinks abortion is okay? What about a world that teaches that aborting a child is an act of love and goodness? How does that fit with the words of Jesus here? Our faith is to be about caring for the littlest, the poorest, the downtrodden of this world, not about exalting ourselves and being in a position of lording it over others. And please note how Jesus frames this truth: **“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes not just me but also him who sent me.”** We do all in Jesus’ name. We do all for the sake and glory of Jesus. We do all in faith because we believe in Jesus and the Father who sent and revealed Jesus. It’s one big package, this interesting thing called faith.

So, faith is hearing, believing, trusting in Jesus. Faith is following with humbleness, yielding to Jesus his greatness and wonder. Faith is serving. Not being served, but serving, even the little child for the sake of Jesus. It makes you think. Is Jesus my Savior? Do I grasp what He has done for me with his life and in his death? Do I hear him? Do I seek His knowledge? Do I serve because he has served me? Lots to think on. Amen.