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Mark 9:34-35

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

When in Doubt, Read the Instructions “Don’t Argue, Agree to Disagree”

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Who among us does not want to be great! That’s seems to be an almost universal longing. Being great is not what Jesus is concerned about. Rather, saying you are “the greatest” is what concerns him. He cannot leave the conversation he heard between the disciples unaddressed. So, he asks them what they are arguing about, and he gets the answer – who is the greatest. To which he makes a response, to which he expects a response. He tells them in his reply what he expects will be their response as his disciples.

In his response, Jesus point them to someone else as a solution to “the greatest” problem. He does not tell them go to a counselor and get your ego in check. “My, oh my, you have some inner work to do.” Rather, Jesus answer was to concentrate on the outer work – serve, be of service. Now don’t hear me say in this there is no place for counseling for a follower of Jesus. I hope you know me better than that. Yet, I bring it up, because Jesus doesn’t want us to miss a discipleship solution to the problem of who is the greatest: look outward, see them, and serve them.

(“Defiance” movie clip – Like Human Beings)

We can’t afford to go against one another.

We can’t afford to lose anyone.

We can’t afford revenge.

Why? Because the cost is too high! Our lives depend on it.

When we argue we think we are right and they are wrong, When we have “rightness” on our side, we feel free to treat others in dismissing and despairing ways, which we justify because of “the cause.”

When we argue we feel superior. We assume our position is better and we are better than the other people. And with the air of superiority comes the urge to step on them, step over them, put them down, and act in ways that we justify based on our misunderstanding that we are superior.

Let us not be deceived, the problem with thinking one is “the greatest, or is better, or knows best, is not simply contained in one’s head; for it moves its way from the heart to the hands, and then to the feet. In other words, we think and then we respond.

Humility brings people toward one another. You can’t help but step forward when you are being humble and leaning in so you can listen. Arrogance puts distance between people. And thus, you now are stepping away from one another. Pride causes us to step on, as opposed to humility, which will cause us to get in close proximity, so we may hear and learn.

Arguments look like they produce winners, but the real truth is both parties lose. The powerful seem to only shout louder and those who feel powerless shut down and then continue to harbor resentment and anger due to being talked over and shut down and out.

(Video: “Respect” by Kelly Clarkson start 46 seconds to the end)

RESPECT – an essential!

Respect ,first begin with curiosity.

When we argue, we are no longer curious. We have decided. We have a set in cement our conclusion. We are sure we know. And that is when the first degree of separation begins.

When we argue, we no longer wonder. We have concluded. We are no longer open to new information. The door hasn't even been left slightly ajar, it has been closed and a pad lock put on, for we have locked in our position or opinion.

When we argue, we no longer notice. We don't see the person who is right in front of us, we don't observe their body language, so as to notice what their position means to them. We turn off our sensitivity meter, because we don't need to see or hear anymore. Because all that really matter is that we are seen and heard.

What difference would it make if we approached every argument armed with only three questions:

I noticed...,

I am curious about...

I wonder...

When we notice, and inquire with the spirit of curiosity and wonder, we move away from judgment and thus still the hammer of oppression. I remember in this last national election, thinking that a member of my extended family was blindly voting. I thought I was right, and thus was better in my voting than hers. Yet, when I had a curious conversation with her – I realized she had thought through why she was voting for this candidate, and thus I had drawn a false conclusion about her.

Is this not the problem with saying one knows better – we come to a quick conclusion that the other person doesn't know a thing. Yet, rarely does someone know nothing. For the other person does know something, and what they have simply chosen to do is to chose what you did not chose. It is difference. It is not all right and all wrong. Life rarely goes that way.

I am often reminded of a phrase in 1 Corinthians 13, “for we all only know in part”. Eventually, we will know it all – have the complete picture, the whole story, but right now we have a chapter if we are lucky, and if not so fortunate, a paragraph, or a sentence or a word. So, in the meantime, let's stay curious of knowing more, from other people's perspective, from where they sit, from where they are standing – how are they seeing things and what causes them to think and act the way they do?

And lastly, Jesus antidote to the sickness of insisting one is “the greatest” is to get up close and personal. To see what the other needs and help them get what they need. The prescription is to work together, to do for one another, to be a servant.

(“Defiance” movie clip – Nothing Is Impossible)

Can we do it?

Some say it is impossible.

Others say some have to be

“the greatest one”, “the better one”, “the right one”.

Yet, as Christians, we know the importance of community.

And if we are to have community, then we must not argue, agree to disagree because we cannot afford to lose anyone.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you.”

Some say all “this is impossible”.

Yet, what we have done is impossible.

All things are possible with God.  
Yes, with the Spirit of unity, all things are possible.  
Even this!