



THE KING'S GAMBIT

"THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST, AND SERVANT OF ALL"

Sept. 23, 2018 Mark 9: 30-37 & Wis. 2: 12, 17-20

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Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [The Depth of God](#)

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[Capernaum](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Stephen Mitchell reminds us: "We forget, often, that the powerful want something from the weak. And what they want isn't power (which they already possess in spades), but legitimacy – the right to power. Ironically, the weak have power over the one thing the mighty value most – namely, *the right to confer or withhold legitimacy.*"

Jesus will teach where legitimate power comes from. He seems to sense that there is a need for more intensive explanation of what real power is about so he takes them aside for some one on one time. He also senses the issue that no one wants the answer to so the question remains unspoken. Jesus himself names the "elephant in the room" as the one of power over others. He reveals that true power is power with others not over others. This kind of awareness was not welcomed then, and isn't welcomed today either. But

this is exactly the kind of power that love has when it seeks only the well-being of the beloved.

Let us sit with those disciples and listen attentively to Jesus' words.

Mk. 9:30-37

30 They left that place and passed through **Galilee**. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was **teaching** his disciples. He said to them, "The **Son of Man** is going to be **betrayed** into the **hands of men**. They will kill him, and after **three days** he will **rise**." 32 But they did not **understand** what he meant and were **afraid to ask** him about it. 33 They came to **Capernaum**. When he was in the **house**, he asked them, "What were you **arguing** about **on the road**?" 34 But they kept **quiet** because on the way they had **argued** about who was the **greatest**. 35 **Sitting down**, Jesus called the **Twelve** and said, "If anyone wants to be **first**, he must be the very **last**, and the **servant** of all." 36 He took a little **child** and had him stand among them. Taking him in his **arms**, he said to them, 37 Whoever **welcomes** one of these little **children** in my name **welcomes** me; and whoever **welcomes** me does not **welcome** me but the **one who sent me**."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Welcoming Jesus is accepting his understanding of God's love. How welcoming are you to his understanding?

PRAYER: Teacher Jesus, you used a little child to illustrate the kind of powerlessness that opens itself to God's love. When I love, I glimpse this truth ever so fleetingly. But then I recoil from the vulnerability that this exposes me to. It is hard to trust that God is like you say God is. Be with me as I let down my guard in loving others so that I can live into the truth of your revelation about the Father. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

GALILEE: Jesus now is on the way to "headquarters", that is, Jerusalem. He leaves the safety of Galilee to move deeper into his walk toward the cross.

What possible reasons can you think of for his determination to confront the temple and its authorities?

TEACHING: This is the second time Jesus talks of his upcoming death. Before, Peter shows that he doesn't understand. Now it's the twelve that reveal they do not 'get it'.

What makes it impossible for the twelve to understand? How does their behavior reveal what is getting in the way?

SON OF MAN: The son of man is Jesus' favorite way to refer to himself. He refused to let people move him into the 'divine man' category like the gentiles did to their leaders / emperors.

Do you think the disciples liked his insistence on this? Is there anything in their responses that indicates that they have already moved him into a more than human category? How is this contributing to their lack of understanding?

BETRAYED: Jesus knew that he would be betrayed when he failed to live up to the expectations developing around him. He knew that the people, when frustrated in their desires, would turn on him when the time came.

Have you ever experienced such a betrayal when you failed to live up to someone's expectations? What makes this a common response to frustration?

HANDS OF MEN: The son of man would be delivered into the hands his human brothers and sisters. When he refused to be more than the son of man, the people would refuse to accept him for who he was.

Is there a way that we still refuse to let Jesus be the 'Son of Man'? How might this contribute to the misunderstanding of God still today?

THREE DAYS: In the days before modern medicine, people were not thought to be really dead until after three days. If no sign of life happened by then, they were truly dead-dead.

Try to remember a time when someone was saying something you did not want to hear for the second time. Can this help you appreciate the dilemma of the disciples?

RISE: The boy that was healed in the previous story appeared dead after the demon left him. Mark sets the scene for this teaching by placing it after this experience.

What prevents the disciples from making the connection and moving closer to Jesus' self-understanding?

UNDERSTAND: To understand means to have stood under something.

Is this what is getting in the way of the disciples' 'getting it'?

AFRAID TO ASK: Sometimes when we have an inkling of something, but are hesitant to admit what it might be, we don't ask clarifying questions. It's the old saying, "I don't ask questions that I don't want the answer to."

What in the disciple's behavior might indicate that this might be happening? Is their queuing up for rank in the future a way to compensate for what might be coming up?

CAPERNAUM / HOUSE: Back at home at Peter's house; Jesus sets the twelve down for more intensive instructions.

When you are in a familiar /safe setting, are you more able to learn and listen? Why is this? (See below)

ARGUE / ARGUING: The disciples were looking toward the time when they would be in charge. This set them to arguing about whom would be the most important. They hoped that the payoff for following Jesus would be privilege and position.

What does this tell you about these men, and what they did or did not hear Jesus say about his death?

ON THE ROAD: Jesus must have overheard what the discussion was as they walked back to Peter's house. The disciples in their preoccupation with results have missed his earlier saying altogether.

When you are "on the road" towards a goal, do you filter out information that does not fit into your plans? Later on, do you find yourself saying; "I should have known that!" Do you think this happened to the disciples after Pentecost?

QUIET: From arguing to awkward silence the disciples now have nothing to say.

What feelings do you think were swirling about in that room? Have you ever felt such an awkward silence? Did this silence enable you to listen better?

GREATEST: Those who are greatest often call the shots for all those in lesser positions. This is the 'way of the world'. Jesus once again teaches that in the Kingdom of God it is not like that. The last will be first, and all, especially the least, are loved by God.

What would happen if all Christians accepted this as truth? What would change in your everyday life if you accepted this truth?

SITTING DOWN: Sitting down was the posture the rabbi's used when they taught. The disciples must have felt that they were going to get a 'lecture' on their bad behavior.

What did they get? Read ahead (vs. 38f) to help with this question.

TWELVE: Twelve was the number of completion. Jesus wants all of the disciples to learn this lesson.

Why would this be important for us to know that all were present? Have you ever been in a situation where it was important for everyone involved to hear the same information at the same time? How did it help?

FIRST / LAST: Once again we hear about the first and the last. Jesus, in his life and actions, shows the 'world' God's way. This is especially hard to understand for the disciples who are tired of being the 'last'.

Have you ever tried to be the servant of others and found a glimpse of Jesus' truth? What did it feel like?

SERVANT: To serve is to work for the well-being of someone or something. If done freely, it is the greatest of freedoms. If done under duress, it is the worst bondage.

How is this teaching of Jesus changing the image of God? Does your image of God include the reality of God's highest good is your well-being?

CHILD /CHILDREN: Children in the time of Jesus were the least in rank.

Who are the least in rank in your world today? At home? At work? At church?



ARMS: Jesus encircles the child in his arms.

Have you ever felt encircled in Jesus' arms? Did you feel like a beloved child then?

WELCOMES: To welcome someone is to say to them; "It is well that you have come".

Who have you said this to someone lately? When it was last said to you? How did you feel?

ONE WHO SENT ME: Jesus tells the disciples that in welcoming others, they welcome God as well.

How might it change your life if you kept this in mind?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mk. 9:30 // Jn. 7:1; Mk. 9:31 // Mk. 8:31; Mt. 17:22; Lk. 9:44, 45;

Mk. 9:33 // Mt. 18:1-5; Lk. 9:46f; Mk. 9:35 // Mt. 20:27; Mk. 9:37 // Mt. 10:40; 18:5; Jn. 13:20;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Wis. 2:12, 17-20; [Ps. 54: 3-8](#); James 3; 16-4:3; Mk. 9:30-37;

Revised Common Lectionary: Prov. 31:10-31; [Ps. 1](#); James 3:13- 4:3, 7-8; Mk. 9:30-37

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

The power of love calls into being what did not exist. The power of love brings hope where there is despair. The power of love brings new life where there was only death. Force is not power. Fear is not power. Death is not power. Only love is power. Only love will prevail. Dr. David Hirstius

We recognize here our common humanity. In the children we see ourselves before we learned to divide into groups in conflict, and we remember we are all children of God. We are all sisters and brothers on one race, the human race. [Fr. Robert Beck](#)

In and through Jesus we come to know God as a powerless God, who becomes dependent on us. But it is precisely in this powerlessness that God's power reveals itself. This is not the power that controls, dictates, and commands. It is the power that heals, reconciles, and unites. It is the power of the Spirit. When Jesus appeared people wanted to be close to him and touch him because "power came out of him" ([Luke 6:19](#)). It is this power of the divine Spirit that Jesus wants to give us. The Spirit indeed empowers us and allows us to be healing presences. When we are filled with that Spirit, we cannot be other than healers. Henri Nouwen

It is interesting to note that those who most frequently call for fair play are those who are advantaged by the play as it currently is, and that only when that position of privilege is endangered are they likely to benefit from the change required to "play by the rules." What if the "rules" are inherently unfair or simply wrong or a greater good is to be accomplished by changing them? When the gospel says, "The last will be first, and the first will be last," despite the fact that it is counterintuitive to our cultural presuppositions, it is invariably good news to those who are last, and at least problematic news to those who see themselves as first. (42)

Gomes, Peter J. *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*. NY. Harper Collins. 2007.

This one thing, the historic Christian Church, was founded on a weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible. For no chain is stronger than its weakest link. G. K. Chesterton

If we take seriously the attribute of divine omnipresence and the revelation of God as Love, then we cannot help but affirm that God is lovingly present always and everywhere. There is no place or circumstance in which this is not the case, so the question this raises for us is whether we are open to this ongoing encounter with God. In each and every moment, our attention is "somewhere," but where? Are we open to the God who is lovingly present to us, or are we "somewhere else?" Phil St. Romain

Jn. 9:37 // Acts of Philip 34: "Unless you change your 'down' to 'up' (and 'up' to 'down' and 'right' to 'left') and 'left' to 'right', you shall not enter my kingdom (of heaven)."

An overlooked phrase of the double commandment is that we are to love God with all our might. One interpretation is that means whatever constitutes our power. It could include money, property, position, charisma, time, and knowledge—whatever gives us leverage in life. In other words, we are to put all we are in the service of divine love. Power is a relative reality. It has many different understandings and an infinitely diverse amount of embodiments, from presidents to legislators to paperboys. But everyone has power.

We all generate influence in the diverse situations of our lives. Even a first-grader has a kindergarten kid to push around. Loving God with all our might and our neighbor as ourselves means a specific use of power, power as service to the next person met. Shea, John. An Experience Named Spirit. Chicago. Thomas More Press 1983. Page 252.

Jesus promises the Kingdom of God in his message, not the Church. He is interested in God's will and man's welfare. The Church is a post-Easter community of faith, and as such only something provisory, a help, a center – where it works- for brotherliness and forgiveness that apply to the whole world. The holders of church offices are to be servants in this service in a community that appeals to Jesus. Kung, Hans. Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View. NY. Doubleday. 1987. Page 96.

CAPERNAUM was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee at a place called Tell Hum. It was the chief commercial and social center of this area during the ministry of Jesus. Here, on the great highway between Syria and Palestine, custom taxes were collected and a Roman garrison was stationed. Here Jesus came after leaving Nazareth, and Peter's home became his home. Here he called Matthew and here he taught and preached, and did "many great works. It had major harbor with people coming and going from all over. It was also on the border of Herod Antipas' territory making it easy to slip over the border if needed to avoid arrest.

I have remarked repeatedly concerning the Powers that they act from concealment. Their compulsive might is never more determinative than when it constrains us invisibly. The Powers that executed Jesus did so under a necessity dictated by the Domination System itself. *It was essential that Jesus be killed without the real reasons becoming known, because such knowledge would unmask the true nature of the Domination System.* If people actually realized, then or now, why Jesus was killed, they would rise up and overthrow the delusionary system that keeps them pacified.

God surely anticipated that a person like Jesus would be killed by an order established on violence, but God did not kill Jesus, or require his death, or manipulate others into sacrificing him. God may have found a way to triumph over this crime, but God did not cause it. Jesus was killed by the definite plan and malice aforethought of the Powers, as the New Testament writers clearly state. They had to kill him, for Jesus represented the most intolerable threat ever placed against the spirituality values, and arrangements of the Domination System. Wink, Walter. Engaging the Powers. Minneapolis, MN. Fortress Press. 1992. Pages 109-110.

"The love of liberty is the love of others; the love of power is the love of ourselves." - William Hazlitt

Jesus also tells us that there are two groups who are very good at trying to deny or avoid this humiliating surprise: those who are very rich and those who are very religious. These two groups have very different plans for themselves, as they try to totally steer their own ships with well-chosen itineraries. They follow two different ways of going up and avoiding all down. Richard Rohr

Mk. 9.30–32: Second Passion prediction (Mt 17.22–23; Lk 9.43–45). This shorter prediction contains the elements of the first (see 8.27–33n.). 31: Betrayed, Isa 53.8. 9.33–10.31: Social teachings. The followers of Jesus, like those in most movements of religious renewal, understood themselves as holding to a superior ethical standard. This unit begins (9.33–35) and ends (10.31) with exhortations or statements that the first shall be last and the last first. See annotation on "inclusio," 8.22–10.52. 9.33–50: Receiving disciples (Mt 18.1–9; Lk 9.46–50). 34–37: Servant, an exhortation to prepare for a lower status position, followed up by the example. The child did not represent innocence but a secondary status, a lesser human. Symbolically, accepting a child in my name, as a true human representative, is analogous to receiving Jesus as sent from God (10.13–16) Pgs. 79-80. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

There's no seeking of *power over* in the Trinity, but only *power with*—giving away and humbly receiving. Richard Rohr

We do not need magic to transform the world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already. We have power to imagine better. - J.K. Rowling

It is this belief in a power larger than myself and other than myself which allows me to venture into the unknown and even the unknowable. - Maya Angelou

“Jesus was a revolutionary, who did not become an extremist, since he did not offer an ideology, but Himself.” -Henri J.M. Nouwen

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2015. Pgs.136-139 . To order contact Carol.Oberfoell@loras.edu

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2009. Pgs. 161-164.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2011-12. Pgs. 130-132.

benShea, Noah. Jacob the Baker. Villard Books, NY.1989. TRUTH, MIRACLES AND MORE: Page 19

UNDERSTANDING IS LIVING IN A HOUSE WHERE EVERY TOOM HAS A POINT OF VIEW: Page 99f.

WHEN I CAN'T FIND MY IGNORANCE I HAVE LOST MY WISDOM: Page 44.

Mitchell, Stephen. The Enlightened Heart. Harper & Row, NY. 1989. TRUTH: Page 37.