Sermon Series: 8 Factors in Life Transformation

Getting Along in the Body

Text: Mark 9:33-50 -- And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." 38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward. 42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' 49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Introduction: Your job might be killing you—literally. More specifically, strained relationships with co-workers could be negatively impacting your health and longevity. That's the conclusion of a 20-year study conducted by researchers at Tel Aviv University. They examined the relationship between the workplace and a person's risk of death. In 1988 the researchers recruited 820 adults and asked them detailed questions about their workplace conditions. At the start of the study the participants ranged in age from 25 to 65 and they worked in a variety of careers. For the next 20 years the researchers tracked the participants. By 2008, 53 of the workers had died. The study found that those who died were significantly more likely to have reported a hostile work environment. Surprisingly, the greatest source of stress came from the employees' co-

workers, not their bosses. The workers who reported little or no social support from their co-workers were 2.4 times more likely to die during the 20-year study than those who said they had supportive bonds with their co-workers. The article concluded that the findings "add evidence that having a supportive social network decreases stress and helps foster good health."

I wonder if the same thing said about the workplace can be said about church life. Just think for a moment about the tremendous potential for conflict that exists as people from various and diverse backgrounds come together to form one body and advance God's kingdom in this world. It's no wonder that arguments arise given the multitude of perspectives and expectations that each of us brings to the table. Though it seems to be ever-present, I'm not convinced that conflict, in and of itself, is bad. In fact, when responded to correctly, it can bring greater peace and edification (**See Romans 14:19**). When it robs the body of peace, however, and ultimately results in division, then it is time for us to take a close look at ourselves and ask the hard questions. What is the cause of these disagreements? Is it possible that we could be KNOWINGLY OR UNKNOWLINGLY contributing to the problem?

Mark 9:33-50 begins with the disciples arguing with one another and ends with Christ's words, "***be at peace with one another***." In between we see three attitudes that, when left unaddressed, can contribute to conflict in the body and prevent us from getting along with one another. The resulting effect is that we no longer are able to enjoy the peace that comes from living under God's rule. I invite you to join me this morning in a study of this passage so that we can guard against any attitude that could divide rather than unite us with others in the body of Christ. Here are three roadblocks to community for your consideration.

The Self-Serving Attitude (**Mark 9:33-37 -- And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me"**). People possessing this attitude are "***ME FIRST***" kind of people. And of course, nothing can disrupt the unity of the body as much as those who believe that everyone else exists for their benefit. Here in **Mark 9:33** we have a great example of the kind of conflict that occurs when people are SELF-SERVING.

As Jesus and His disciples were traveling to Capernaum, the twelve debated ***which of them was the greatest.*** This was a hotly contested issue among the more prominent Jews of the time. You may remember that they were known to jockey for the positions of honor when they came together (**Luke 14:7 -- Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor**). Our Lord said of them in **Mark 12:38-39**, "**Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets**." ***The Dead Sea Scrolls*** tell us that the people who lived in the religious sect at QUMRAN actually ranked the entire community according to the worthiness of each individual. The Pharisees would have loved that!

Because of human nature, now it was the disciples that had somehow managed to get caught up in the same debate. When asked by Christ about the nature of their discussion, they were silent, probably out of embarrassment, yet their lack of response spoke volumes. Jesus, in the posture of a rabbi (sitting), reminded them of the call to SELF-DENIAL (**If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all**). Greatness, according to our Lord is not measured by how many people serve YOU, but by how many PEOPLE you serve! It is not found in how much you PROFIT from others, but in how much you SACRIFICE for them! Taking an illustration from real life, Jesus then had a little child stand in the midst of the disciples. He took the boy in his arms and announced that anyone who welcomes a little child in His name, welcomes Christ, and ultimately the Father. It's interesting that the same **Aramaic word** is used for both "child" and "servant." I'm sure that was intentional. Our Lord wants us to know that we are to receive children/servants (**the lowliest of those living during the 1st century in the middle east**) with the same enthusiasm that we receive the Father! TO SUCCEED AT THIS, ONE COULD NOT BE A SELF-SERVING PERSON!

True greatness is seen in putting others before ourselves. Self-centered individuals have a hard time with this. They're the kind of people who believe the world evolves around them. They rarely, if ever, do anything kind for someone else just because it's the right and kind thing to do. I'm thinking about a greedy old man who, while on his deathbed, called for his only heir, his forty-year-old son, to come to his side. ***"Tell me dad, what can I do for you?" "Well son, this watch has been in our family for five generations …"*** Before he could finish his son said, ***"And now you want to pass it on to me?" "No,"*** replied the dying man, ***"I just wanted to ask if you'd like to buy it."*** This kind of behavior is inconsistent

with the call to discipleship that Christ offers in these verses. IF YOU WANT TO BE GREAT, SERVE OTHERS! There is no room for self-centeredness in the body of Christ..

The Self-Sufficient Attitude (**Mark 9:38-42 -- John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward. 42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea**). SELF-SUFFICIENT PEOPLE REALLY BELIEVE THEY DON'T NEED ANYONE'S HELP. As a result, they are unwilling to allow others to do what they do because they can always do it better and likely want the glory for themselves. NOTE WHAT HAPPENS TO THE TWELVE WHEN THEY STRUGGLE WITH THIS ATTITUDE. Having quieted the debate about who was the greatest among them, Jesus is asked to comment on one outside of the circle of the twelve who was engaging in the work for which they were commissioned in **Luke 9:1-2 -- And Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal**. **Imagine how they must have felt when someone they didn't know was taking their place in doing the work for which they had been commissioned.** <u>The nerve of the guy! To make matters worse, he was having success – he was casting out demons -- where they had experienced failure</u> (**Mark 9:17-18 -- A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not**").

We do not know for certain that the man to whom they were referring was a believer in Jesus . Not all who are able to cast out demons in the name of Christ are part of the kingdom (**Matthew 7:21-23 -- "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me**). ***<u>I believe the Bible leaves this a little vague on purpose</u>***. When it comes to others we don't always know WHY people do what

they do. The only basis we have to form opinions is by OBSERVING THEIR ACTIONS. At bear minimum we can see that this man understood that an essential dimension of Christ's mission was the confrontation and defeat of the Devil (**1 John 3:8 -- the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil**). The fact that he experienced success "***in the name of Jesus***" means that our Lord was the One ordering the demons to leave. With this in mind, Jesus tells them, "**Do not stop him**." **While the twelve wished to have exclusive rights to the power of God, Jesus wanted them to rejoice that a mighty work was done and His name was proclaimed**. He exhorted them to welcome participation in the mission, even from the most unexpected sources. By casting out demons the man had demonstrated that he was not against Christ. The assumption, then, was that he was for Christ. Our Lord then made the point that the opportunities for participation in the mission are many. Even offering a cup of cold water in His name to a believer will bring a reward.

THERE IS ROOM FOR ALL SORTS OF MINISTRY IN THE KINGDOM. THERE IS NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN 'TRIVIAL' AND 'IMPORTANT' TASKS IN SERVING CHRIST. ALL ARE NECESSARY AND EQUALLY VALUABLE. WOE TO THE PERSON WHO NEGATES THE WORK OF OTHERS AS INVALID OR UNNECESSARY AND SO TRIES TO PREVENT IT. The resulting discipline will be so severe that it would be better for the person to be drowned before he could commit such an act.

It's easy to stand in judgment of others when it comes to ministry, particularly when we attempt to guess their motives. I have come to learn that the principle taught in this passage is helpful in forming my opinions of others. If they are not 'against' Christ in what they are saying or doing, then I should give them the benefit of the doubt and assume they are 'for' Him. This is very different from the way in which Jesus says we should evaluate our own motives. To those who accused Jesus of casting out demons by the ruler of demons He said, "**He who is not with me is against me** (**See Matthew 12:24-30**)." Because we are more aware of our own motives than those of others, we should judge ourselves more critically. Self-sufficient people never think about their own motives. They are quick in their evaluation of others, but slow in taking a close look at themselves. This is a sure-fire way to disrupt the unity of the body. (SELF-SERVING; SELF-SUFFICIENT)

The Self-Indulgent Attitude (**Mark 9:43-50 -- And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 47**

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' 49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another"). Lastly, our Lord points out those who would rather INDULGE THEIR SINFUL PASSIONS than seek after eternal life. These individuals are enslaved to sin (they constantly reach for it, run toward it and gaze upon it) and would be wise to do whatever is necessary to flee the source of temptation. It is better, according to Christ, to remove that which leads us into sin (**See Mark 10:21**) and inherit eternal life, then to cling to sin and face the judgment of God and the fires of Hell (**Gehenna**-- a valley along the south side of Jerusalem that became a dumping ground for human excrement and rubbish. The fire that consumed the garbage never went out, and the worms never died—**See Isaiah 66:22-24**).

These verses are not teaching that people go to heaven because they conquer sin and overcome its effect. Rather that those who enter into life through Christ will gladly take radical steps to keep from sinning any further. Not only will unbelievers face "fire," but so will believers. Only in **verse 49**, this refers to the "fires" of trial and testing in the life of a believer (**1 Peter 4:12 - Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you**). Just as offerings were sprinkled with salt (**See Leviticus 2:13**), so we offer our lives to Christ as we endure trials and suffering instead of indulging our every sinful desire. It is this kind of conduct that ultimately holds the body together. Those who serve sin will never be able to live at peace with those who serve Jesus. (Review: **Self-Serving; Self-Sufficient** (meaning -- to be enough – **2 Corinthians 12:9**); **Self-Indulgent** – two words in Greek – one means rest or ease and the other – a satisfaction of the flesh. SERVING, SUFFICIENT AND INDULGENT ARE WORDS THAT CAN HAVE A GOOD MEANING IN SCRIPTURE, BUT IF YOU PUT THE WORD "SELF" IN FRONT OF THEM, NOT SO MUCH).

The Transformational Discipleship Study: In Lifeway's survey regarding the **eight factors they say are essential in life transformation,** the respondents indicated that Christian community really matters. In fact, they believe the best way to be in community with your brothers and sisters in Christ is to volunteer with them. **Here's what the survey revealed**: **Sixty-eight percent** (*more than 2/3rds*) agree with the statement, "***I have developed significant relationships with people at my church***." However, only **Forty percent** say they intentionally make time in

their schedules to fellowship and interact with other believers. Sadly, only **twenty-eight percent** said they intentionally spend time with other believers in order to help them grow in their faith. **Do you see a pattern here?** The more that is required of a relationship, the less willing most church-goers are to seek it out. Here are some other findings: **(1)** Most of those polled neglect regular classes for adults like Sunday School, Bible studies or other small group activities. Two-thirds say they don't attend these kinds of adult classes; **(2)** Those who attend adult classes, like Bible Studies or Sunday School, tend to score higher on "Building Community" in the church; **(3)** Other actions that predict a greater investment in relationships include prayer groups, individual prayer for one's church and leaders and assuming a regular responsibility at church. **Scott McConnell**, the vice-president of LifeWay Research, notes ***that most attendees have friends at church, but only a minority invest time to help other believers develop their faith***.

THE PATHWAY TO HOLY RELATIONSHIPS IS TO CRUCIFY THE SINFUL FLESH THAT MAKES US SELF-SERVING, SELF-SUFFICIENT AND SELF-INDULGENT. As we wrap this up, here are three things to think about from Matthew 16:24 that help us maintain the right attitude – *"***Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me***."*

- **To experience Christ-centered community, you must lay something down** – deny yourself
- **To experience Christ-centered community, you must lift something up** – take up your cross
- **To experience Christ-centered community, you must live something out** – follow Jesus

Conclusion: As Christians we take communion together regularly. The word comes from the Latin **"*communio*"** and means **a sharing in common.** The Greek equivalent, as far as I can tell, is **"koinonia,"** normally translated as "**fellowship** (**See Acts 2:42**)." Now, certainly, communion has become for us the act of sharing in a celebration of the remembrance of the sacrifice that Christ made in payment for our sin**. But I'm learning that communion is more than that. It is not only a recalling of what Christ has done for us; it is sharing together the oneness that Christ brings to us. Lee Eclov** of **the Village Church of Lincolnshire** shares this story about communion. A young friend called me to say she'd admitted herself to a psychiatric hospital. While she was there, I visited her when I could. One of my visits was on Good Friday. I asked her if she'd like for me to bring Communion to her. She said she would and asked if some of the other hospitalized Christians could join us. On that spring afternoon, five or six of us gathered in her room and

shared the sacred meal. I think it was the most meaningful Communion service I ever shared—half a dozen strangers, each scarred by heartache, sitting helpless in a locked ward. Yet Jesus was there because we were there as his beloved. He was not only among us, but he was there *within* us. Even as broken people, we were one with each other. We were strengthened by his presence; we were healed, in a way. We were nourished, washed, and rejuvenated all because we had Communion. Does this sound good to you? Are you ready to begin building the kind of relationships with one another where we commune with Christ and each other at the same time? **The key is to lay down any self-serving, self-sufficient and self-indulgent attitudes and learn to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ.**