



Sermon

For the week of October 4, 2009

based on Mark 9:30-37

Football teams often gather into a huddle to review their strategy and game plan. Then they break the huddle and hit the field to carry it out.

That's the picture we've been using as the theme for our autumn sermon series, "Breaking the Huddle." When Christians gather together in worship, it's as if we are in a huddle. We gather around Jesus and his Word. We review our identity and our calling. But then we break the huddle, leave our church building and return to our own parts of the community to carry out what we've learned

Last week, Pastor Kuehl showed us that living for Christ takes courage. Today, we'll see why: Jesus asks us to sacrifice. So we...

Break the Huddle - with a Sacrificial Faith

Review your own sacrifice game plan

Replace it with Jesus' strategy

Then go out and take a hit for the person who lines up next to you

I. Review your sacrifice game plan.

In Mark 9, Jesus leaves behind the general public and huddles up¹, so to speak, with the Twelve to teach them about sacrifice.²

When Jesus speaks of sacrifice, the concept he has in mind is "taking a hit for others." Picture in your mind a football player who throws his body in the way of another player in order to protect his quarterback. This lineman just took a hit for someone else.

Why does Jesus choose sacrifice as the topic for his huddle with the Twelve? Sacrifice was not a new word to Christ's followers. They had already sacrificed much in order to follow him. James and John took a hit to their job. They left behind a fishing business with dad and sunrises on the Sea of Galilee. Matthew left behind his job security and lucrative income of a tax collector. Peter left behind his marriage partner. While she was in Galilee, he was two states away, following his new rabbi throughout the Judean wilderness.

And why would I speak to you, Christian, about sacrifice? This is not a new concept to you. The very fact that our congregation exists prove that sacrifices are being made. We are a non-profit supported entirely by free-will contributions. Everyone here has made a sacrifice of their time by leaving something else you could be doing at home. Why, in our church office we have lists of hundreds of names of people who volunteer in our many service events and church organizations.

The reason why is that even people who make sacrifices can make them for the wrong reasons. Even Jesus' sacrificial disciples began to use their acts of sacrifice as the basis for their relative importance to each other. This led to insult and argument.³ You can imagine how it might have sounded, as Peter and James boast, "We were first-round draft picks in Jesus' disciple draft. We are in Jesus inner circle! But no one even knows who you are, Jude!"

Likewise, Moses' fellow leaders Miriam and Aaron had given much for the welfare of their people, yet demanded more recognition than Moses was giving them.⁴ It's clear that even God's people can have a view of sacrifice warped by sin-twisted desire for greatness or recognition.

¹ "They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples."

² He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him..."

³ "When he was in the house, he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest."

⁴ See Numbers 12 for more details.

So review your sacrifice game plan. Have you gained acceptance from peers and pleasure by sacrificing your virginity? Have you gained a career by sacrificing your family? Have you gained the last word in an argument by sacrificing your mercy? These are examples of dangerous sacrifices, about which Proverbs 14 applies, "There is a way that seems right, but in the end it leads to death." The gains are both fleeting and fatal.

II. Replace it with Jesus' strategy for sacrifice.

Because sacrificial actions can be done with the wrong goal in mind, let's return to the huddle with Jesus, and replace our sin-tainted views on sacrifice with Christ's own strategy. Let's listen in as he describes the sacrificial nature of his mission on earth, and the sacrificial mission he has devised for his people on earth.

As Jesus speaks about sacrifice to the Twelve, it is clear that his concept differs from theirs. What he describes to them goes right over their heads. What he is telling them about sacrifice doesn't make sense to them. In fact, it even scares them.⁵ His strategy led to a trap ("I will be betrayed") and a cemetery ("they will kill me"). Lastly, he called a child and explained, "Whoever welcomes a little child welcomes the one who sent me." This didn't make any sense. Jesus wanted them to give of their time and attention for a child - a dependent.

Surely, these seemed like bad investments to make. Children are a drain on resources in a very real way. (You drive them to school, they never drive you to work. You buy them breakfast cereal and clothing, but they never buy Starbucks for you. You rearrange your schedule for them when they are sick, but they don't drop everything to nurse you back to health!) Later in the Gospel of Mark we'll find the disciples shooing children away so they don't cause a bother to Jesus and his ministry.

Despite the fact that these sacrifices seem like bad investments, Jesus identified such sacrifices as the way to the Father.⁶

But look closer at Jesus strategy for sacrifice. Unlike many other religious figures who call for sacrifice from their followers, Jesus didn't just *demand* sacrifice, he *became* Sacrifice.⁷ He came not to push us into threatening situations, but to lead the way into them, so that we could follow behind in safety. His sacrifice means that my guilt before God has been forgiven. My self-centered decisions have been erased. Through Jesus I know that God is my friend, not my enemy. Everything I need for my well being he promises I will have.

Now that Jesus' one, perfect, sacrifice on the cross cemented my good relationship with God and the promise of a bright future with him, I no longer need to rely on the stuff of this world to do so any longer. This fact transforms my sacrificial decisions from acts that are scary (acts of fear) into expressions of freedom (I am safe with God on my side!) The things we Christians valued so highly in the past lose their worth when compared to the value of knowing Christ. All else become, in a way, like broken idols. I find that broken idols, like broken toys, are easy to give away. Through Christ you and I are enabled and inspired to...

III. Get out there and take a hit for the person who lines up next to you.

Becoming a great Christian (in Jesus' sense of the word) means becoming a teammate and guardian of others. Not everyone understands this.

Todd is a spiritual man, yet he wrongly claims, "My faith and how I express it is just between me and God!"

But God responds, "Read Galatians 5:14 and 6:10!" *The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.* To do these things requires other people. There is no such thing as a Christian standing alone. The moment we receive our identity as children of God, is the moment we become part of a family.

Sometimes God himself chooses your position of sacrifice for you. Without much choice you maybe placed next to an ailing, elderly parent. Along with your job comes a difficult boss. You may look at your marriage and realize somehow you're standing next to an ungrateful spouse. You are a parent and find a challenging son in your home. Despite the difficulties of each situation, a Christian can see in them the opportunity to sacrifice - to take a hit in order to serve another.

⁵ "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.' But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it."

⁶ "He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, '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.'"

⁷ See Hebrews 7:27.

At other times, God sets you free to choose your own position of sacrifice. You can look around you decide on your own who to serve. It is important to do this, especially in such a large family of believers as St. Paul's. Our church family must intentionally work to build faith friendships - or else many of us will be little fishies lost and alone in a big ocean of people. We must seek "togetherness."

One helpful way to do this is through our Connector Groups. Connector Groups bring people together using the tool called GroupWork. GroupWork is a piece of paper updated each week with 3 types of questions on it: "Getting to know me," "About the sermon," and "Into the Bible" questions. When people gather together around this GroupWork, the Holy Spirit will draw them closer to each other in both a friendly way and a spiritual way.

GroupWork is extremely accessible and flexible. You can download it each week from our church website. You can pick it up on the way out of worship from our information center. You can use it as a family devotion tool around the supper table on a weeknight. I encourage you to make use of it by calling up 5 friends and inviting them to your home a few times a month in your own self-forming Connector Group. If you would like assistance finding others to group with, check the box on the connection card used in worship and we'll help you out. For more information, grab a brochure from the information center in the church entryway.

There's a catch. If you are going to live out your identity and seek out ways to serve others, it will require a sacrifice of time. You will have to take a hit in some way to make the growth of your faith friendships possible.

But that won't stop us. Christ and his Christians are all about sacrifice.

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October 4, 2009

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