

## The Inclusive Community

### Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 20, 2009

Mark 9:30-37

Theme: Ambition and Commitment

Terry and Fred Quinn

Terry: Thinking about today's theme of ambition and commitment, we reflect on the scene of the apostles squabbling over who is the greatest among them. They are certainly filled with ambition, but with no apparent understanding of what commitment to the message of Jesus really entailed.

Listening to the argument among his disciples, Jesus must have been thinking, like many teachers, "Haven't these guys understood a word I've been saying?" So, like most teachers, he turns to an analogy to better open their minds and hearts. As he did when he asked the little children to come to him, he again speaks of the spirit of childhood. Keep in mind that children were on the lowest rung of the social ladder. Unencumbered by the machinations of the adult world or the influences of commercialism, the child responds without guile with openness to goodness and acceptance. Jesus was asking his disciples to see his kingdom, not in a materialistic, temporal way, but in a way, like children, -- open to the road ahead. That road might be the road with the poor, the disenfranchised, the sick, those who seek justice, and those who may not look like you or speak like you or pray like you. So he was not pointing the way to acting LIKE a child in the sense of being childlike, but in the sense of openness to the spirit, to having the empathy, compassion, commitment to the least among us—to being able to identify with those who like children at the time of Jesus,

were at the bottom rung of the ladder---- instead of seeking to be at the top or fighting for the top position. That Way, the way of Jesus and of Paul, indicated service to the other, not self-importance or one-upmanship. Jesus was not interested in power or authority or the kind of ambition that was one-dimensional and self-seeking. He was more interested in creative ambition, the mark of a good leader, one who seeks the greater good, who seeks to be of service to others and to the world around her or him. This kind of service lends itself to the emergence of shared beauty, art, music, scientific knowledge, true friendship, moments of empathy and grace which all of us can relate to in some measure in our daily lives. This kind of service, involving true commitment, levels the playing field, so that arguments or ambition for power or authority have no real meaning.

Just as the growing child emerges into the adult world with possibilities before her or him, the ambition and commitment to the kingdom of the here and now-- -is a commitment to respond to the spirit within and to use one's gifts and share one's gifts---simply to do the best we can to make ourselves and the world around us a little bit better. Dr. Seuss in the book *Oh the Places You'll Go* says,

" So be sure when you step,  
Step with care and great tact  
And remember that Life's  
A Great Balancing Act.  
And will you succeed?  
Yes! You will indeed!  
(98 and 3/4% guaranteed.)  
KID YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!

When Ted Kennedy died a few weeks ago, the Star Ledger said that he was a social justice Catholic. He was certainly ambitious, as all politicians are---but an ambition to change the country and the world for the better, a commitment to help to make that happen. We were inspired as we watched the celebratory wake and pageantry of the funeral Mass. But it was the voices of his children and grandchildren that made the most impression on us, and probably most of the viewing public. We'd like to repeat the very last words spoken at his funeral, spoken by a child—his granddaughter Kiley-----

**"When most people think of Ted Kennedy, they think about the man who changed the lives of millions of people by fighting for a better health care. When I think about him, vibrant memories of sailing, laughing, Thanksgiving dinner, talking on the front porch and playing with Splash come to mind. To me, all the things he has done to change the world are just icing on my grandpa's cake of a truly miraculous person.**

**"You see, my grandpa was truly a kid." Perhaps we can say that Kiley's grandpa, though he could have basked in being at the top of the financial and social ladder, always tried to work for and remember those at the bottom.**

**Fred: I have two stories of people who have creative ambition, who seek to be of help to others and the world around them, perhaps reaching into their inner child seeing possibilities and following them.**

**The first is a story of a man who found a way to serve others in a huge way by seeing possibilities in using things that he saw in his daily life.**

**Bruce Charnash can certainly be recognized as a person who had achieved much. He is a graduate of Cornell Medical, a noted heart specialist in New York City and associate professor at a medical school. He has a reputation of being a very energetic worker. One day while attending a conference he was asked the question. "What are you doing to help others?" He thought about that question very intensely after the conference. It challenged him. Gradually he began to conceive of a plan that was far beyond anything he had ever considered before. He was well aware that many are suffering and even dying in third world countries because of the lack of medical supplies and equipment. He had often thought of the enormous amount of waste of useable medical supplies, an estimated seven thousand tons from US hospitals and clinics on any given day. Hospitals use many items that come in multi-product packages and, although**

the unused items are individually packaged, rules forbid the later use of articles in the big package that weren't used when it was opened. So he created a non-profit organization called "Doc to Dock" to collect available medical supplies, and distribute them to hospitals in Africa and the Near East. The organization began its search for supplies in 2005 and the first shipment was sent a year later to Ghana. Cost for shipping and handling of one large container is \$20,000. The value of the contents of the container is \$400,000 a return of \$20 to one per shipment. After two years, the organization had collected over 5 million dollars of supplies and had a promise of 25 million more dollars of supplies per year from the North-shore Long Island Jewish Health Care System, a fifteen hospital network. Into the third year of operation, the Church of Ghana volunteered to oversee escorting the shipments to the hospital to avoid any corruption. The organization is steadily growing in collections, donations, and places to send shipments. Reportedly the dramatic stories of lives saved is beyond belief. Bruce Charnash seeks no publicity for what he does but spends his energy in increasing the available help he has discovered. This is person who was able to look beyond himself to help people .

There are stories all around us of people who are open to the Spirit with empathy and compassion for the least among us.

My second story came to me Thursday at a meal after a funeral. I met a woman who was sitting at my table who really impressed me. After I introduced myself, Elysa said, "So you're the storyteller! I've heard about you." After talking for a short while about what I do, she said, "I have a story for you-- my story." This woman left a teaching position in a well-to-do Bergen County community by choice to get a job in the poorest section of Elizabeth teaching a special education class of 11 and 12 year olds. Her class is comprised of both mentally challenged and behaviorally challenged students. She is strict but after awhile the children start to realize that she loves them. She tells them during their day in school that she is their mother. She gives them her phone number and sometimes gets a call for help during the evening from a kid who needs her assistance. She spoke about kids who have moved on from her class who call her to let her know how they are doing, who ask how she is and who tell her

how much she has meant to them. After our conversation, I promised to get involved with storytelling at her school.

These are just two examples of people who were on the top rings of the ladder, but who walked down to be with the “children”----- where Jesus meant for the disciples to be.