

Biblical Background

MARK 9:30-37

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: Jesus and his disciples left from Caesarea Phillipi which is in the mountains north of Galilee close to modern day Syria. The head of the Jordan River is located in Caesarea Phillipi. It would require a six-day journey to get there along ancient Roman roads. Arriving in Capernaum, which is right on the Sea of Galilee, they would most likely arrive at Peter's House which was becoming a central gathering place during this point in Jesus' ministry.

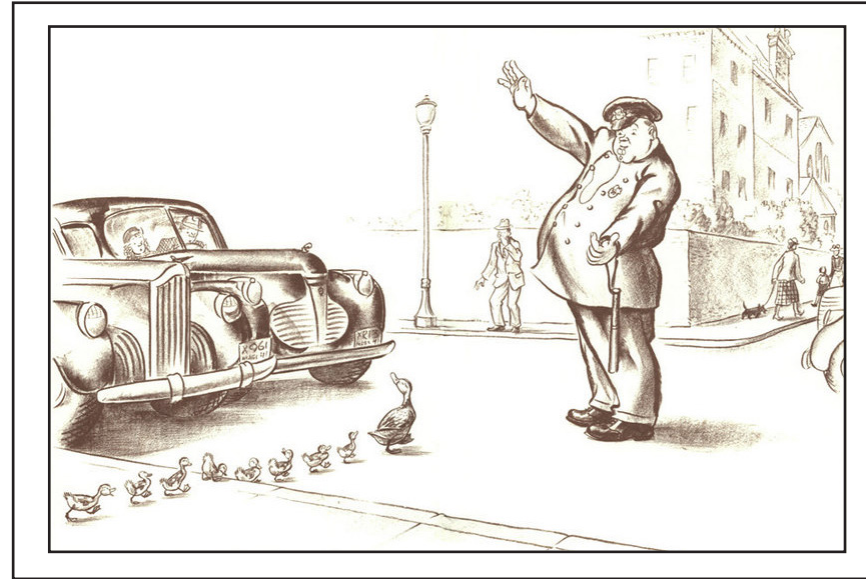
TERMS: Journey People traveled in groups for safety. It was considered very dangerous to be outside of the security of walled cities and homes, as people could encounter wild beasts and bandits on the open road. Walking was the way most people traveled. People carried walking sticks for support and protection. The average person could walk 17-23 miles in a day. Friends and extended family would provide support of hospitality along the way. Inns were considered more dangerous as marginalized clientele gathered there, such as those who were more detached without family and friends. **Child** Jesus calls forth a child to illustrate that his mission is to turn the whole paradigm upside down. In the time of Jesus, childhood was a time of terror. Infant mortality rates were around 30 percent. This was the result of unconquered disease and poor hygiene. Children had no status in that themselves they are considered equal to a slave. Children were loved, but were valued in regard to their usefulness for now and for the future. Their "use" was to be of service both in the present and the future, thus contributing to the family's strength. Western cultures tend to place children first and above all, most likely due to the influence of Christianity, but even into the Middle Ages people were taught in a famine that children were to be the last to save as they were not strong or useful. Jesus turns this whole paradigm upside down.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: The meaning of to be "first" and not "last" reflects an attitude of cultural survival. The disciples here who are followers of Jesus (apostles would be consider close friends, intimately knowing Jesus), get worried as Jesus speaks of his upcoming death. Who is going to be in charge when Jesus dies? This reflects their concern about self-survival, which is why Jesus is angered by it. Jesus is about to lead humanity into a new era and reality; one that conquers the limitations of death. To demonstrate the shift in priorities of the kingdom his Father calls for, Jesus calls the apostles, his trusted friends, who he is entrusting his mission and leadership to out of the crowd. He then brings forth a child to illustrate to them clearly that his mission is to turn the world, and the paradigm upside down. In Middle Eastern culture at the time, a person would save himself before saving a child. Jesus is trying to explain that is no longer the rule. He is about to lay his life down for others, for us. Save others! This is what Jesus's mission is all about.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Through embracing the child, Jesus is pointing to the new paradigm that he is bringing into the world. It is his Father's work to do so. The vulnerable and selfless have priority over property and status. Leaders are especially called to defend and care for the little ones. The question is what the role of leaders in the new community of Jesus' followers will be. Their question to Jesus is, "Lord if you die, who will be first?" A child makes it clear.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: How can we work to put children first in our homes and communities?

CHARACTER QUALITIES: SERVANT LEADERSHIP
PRIMACY OF THE VULNERABLE

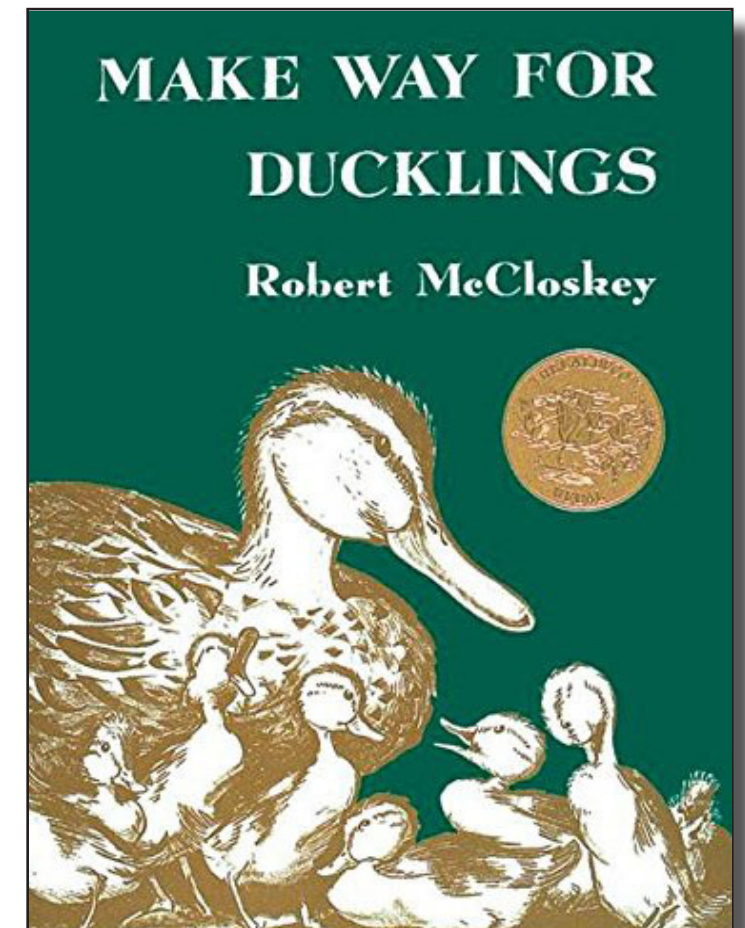
FAMILY ACTIVITIES: 1) Brainstorm different things that we fear. Who are the monsters and scary things in our lives? Get a large piece of poster paper, trace your body on it, and then create a monster, or a personification of something that you would be scared of in the desert. This can be an animal, a being, or an experience such as failure, being left out, etc. The point is to help children name their fears, and encourage them that they can conquer their fears by slowing down, remembering they have the Holy Spirit within them to call upon to calm their fears and to fight their fears with faith. Create a meditation prayer to encourage stillness and to practice calling upon the Holy Spirit and the angels to conquer their fears.

2) How can we, as individuals and as families, find time for stillness and prayer in Lent? Research the places in your state and diocese where people live and pray in silence. Talk about what it is like or show pictures of these places. How might you find silence and the "desert experience" around you in your suburban and urban setting? How can you create a place of prayer and quiet in your home?

CYCLE B 25TH SUNDAY
ORDINARY TIME

Living Grace

"JESUS CALL LEADERS TO SERVE THE
SMALLEST FIRST"



*In **Make Way for Ducklings**, Mrs. Mallard was sure that the pond in the Boston Public Gardens would be a perfect place for her and her eight ducklings to live. The problem was how to get them there through the busy streets of Boston. But with a little help from the Boston police, Mrs. Mallard and Jack, Kack, Lack, Nack, Ouack, Pack, and Quack arrive safely at their new home!*

Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



MIGRANT COTTON PICKER AND HER BABY

Photograph taken near Buckeye, Maricopa County, AZ by Dorothea Lange ~ 1940
U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

EXPLORING THE ART:

THE POWER OF IMAGES

As the United States sank into the Great Depression, a photographer named Dorothea Lange turned her attention away from studio and portrait work toward the suffering she was seeing around her. The Great Depression was especially hard on farmers. They not only suffered through the national economic crisis but endured a string of natural disasters, including floods and dust storms that devastated their crops and destroyed their livelihoods. The Resettlement Administration, one of the agencies established by Franklin D. Roosevelt's progressive social policies, employed a team of photographers to document the lives of these migrant workers. The object was to demonstrate the need for federal assistance and justify legislation that would make it possible. Dorothea Lange was among the agency photographers whose task, as the program's director explained, was to "introduce America to Americans." Her photographs bring us closer to the subject and makes the situation more personal. Photographs can be powerful eyewitness accounts that allow people to quickly grasp the meaning and emotion of an event. This photograph was published in newspapers, and Americans were outraged that this could happen in America. The federal government responded by shipping thousands of pounds of food to feed the migrants.

Sunday Gospel

MARK 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began
a journey through Galilee,
but he did not wish anyone to know about it.
He was teaching his disciples and telling them,
"The Son of Man is to be handed over to men
and they will kill him,
and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise."
But they did not understand the saying,
and they were afraid to question him.

They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house,
he began to ask them,
"What were you arguing about on the way?"
But they remained silent.
They had been discussing among themselves on the
way
who was the greatest.
Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them,
"If anyone wishes to be first,
he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."
Taking a child, he placed it in their midst,
and putting his arms around it, he said to them,
"Whoever receives one child such as this in my name,
receives me;
and whoever receives me,
receives not me but the One who sent me."

Read-aloud video link:
[MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS](#)
Written & Illustrated by Robert McCloskey

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

JESUS POINTS TO CHILDREN AS THE PRIORITY FOR LEADERS.

In this gospel, Jesus tells us that those who wish to lead and to be first, must be the last. Jesus demonstrates this by pointing to the primacy of the vulnerable to his apostles. Jesus calls forth a child, a person who had no legal status in society and could do little on their own. Jesus illustrates that the role of a leader, the greatest, is to become one with the least and to carry on this work through service. Status in society is irrelevant to being a disciple and apostle of Jesus. Jesus is about status reversal, and so is the kingdom of God.

In our children's story, in the busy hustle and bustle of a big city center, everything stops for the young ducklings. Jesus tells us the same is to be true for all Christian leadership - the needs of children and all the vulnerable must be considered most important.

Jesus explains that the Messiah will be handed over and killed, but adds that in three days he will rise. This is incomprehensible. In response to the unknown, the apostles become fearful and start worrying about what it will be like for Jesus to be gone. The apostles wonder who will lead. They ask who is the greatest among them. They want to know what is going to happen. Their heads are spinning, and they start arguing about what it means to lead.

To make an impact that he knows will shock people, Jesus calls forth a child. Walking in the way of Jesus is to walk in the way of sacrificial love. To lead is to lay one's life down in service, not to lord over people, but to care for them, especially for the vulnerable of society. In the time of Jesus, children had the same status as slaves. They were the weak and could not contribute strength. Thus, to prize a child over all effectively communicates Jesus' point: that the call of his Father is to turn the whole paradigm upside down.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

MY STORY: When have you gotten too distracted by the world to notice the needs of the vulnerable around you? Does that ever happen on the playground at school? How might YOU as a Christian leader (remembering that all Christians are called to lead by example) show, in your everyday life, that the weakest are the most important?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: How does Policeman Michael in our story demonstrate that the little ones in our world are the most important? Do you think people in Boston liked being stopped for some little ducks to cross the road?

THE GOSPEL STORY: Why do you think the disciples had a hard time understanding Jesus when he talked about his upcoming death and resurrection? How do you think this conversation made them feel? What might they have been arguing about? Do you ever argue with your siblings about who is the most important in the family? Why does Jesus bring a child in front of his apostles? What do you think it means when Jesus says the least is the greatest?

How might we, as a church community and as families, call forth the children to be more visible? To be perceived as most important?