**Markl 9: 30 - 37.**

When I was first introduced to preaching, almost 30 years ago now, I was given the advice that I should try to limit any sermon to covering just three points.

Sometimes that works, sometimes it would be less than helpful and miss many of the things which are important for us to hear.

There are also times when one point is so important that including anything else would diminish it.

Sometimes it is difficult to know what points we should want to make, or in fact what if the preacher is merely putting forward their own view of the world.

When you have the privilege to stand up here and preach, usually without being challenged, you have the responsibility to be careful to remember that all we are, or should be trying to do, is make what we hear and read from scripture more accessible and understandable.

At least to those able to stay awake.

The Gospel we heard this morning has very much given a situation which helps me make three over arching points and thus follow the initial advice I was given. At least I hope so.

It seems to me that what we heard from Mark is about three things, about Jesus, about being human and about the outlook we need to have to be a follower of Jesus.

What do I mean by this?

In the first couple of verses we hear Jesus explain to his disciples what is to happen to him, his death and resurrection, which is fundamental to who he is.

As we know Jesus is an excellent teacher and leader but to me in this period of his ministry he is acting more like a coach of his particular chosen team. We hear that he has taken them away from the crowds to talk to them directly and discretely.

I don’t think it’s a secret that I am a great fan of rugby union, I used to play and still have a keen interest watching Sale Sharks whenever I get the chance, on TV or live. In fact if there is a game on TV I will try to watch whoever it is, Saracens beating Bristol Bears on Friday night for instance.

What Jesus is doing with his disciples is very much how a good coach works. First they select the right people, not all the same, not all with the same set of skills or personalities, but all who have one aim which unifies them as a Group.

The coach then has to work with each of them to develop their individual skills, in a professional rugby club the coach gets help here from assistant coaches with specialist skills for each different position on the field.

The head coach then has to bring all these things together by making sure that each member of the team knows how their skills fit into the game plan the coach has put together to try to defeat the opposition.

They also have to learn how they can each support their team mates for the good of the team not just going out for their own glory.

Jesus wanted his disciples to know what their opposition was going to be like and how they might work to spread the message he had brought to them, supporting each other.

But as we move on we get to see the human traits coming out.

They did not find it easy to understand what Jesus really meant, what he was saying seemed alien to them, they wanted to understand but we are told they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

I’m sure we can understand that, it may have been that they did not know what they wanted to ask, what he was saying was so outside their experience of life up to then.

They tried to get what he said to fit into their understanding, they were used to having some people be in charge and be more important than others so they applied this to their group.

We all like to think we are more important than the average, that there is something special about us which sets us apart. But the reality is we are all the same.

We are all born unable to do very much of anything other than eat sleep and in very simple ways let whoever is around us know when we need something.

It is as we grow and find the influences of our environment that we start to feel if we have a particular place within it.

Modern life with all the instant communication of social media platforms where influencers tell us what is good and what is not and how we should feel and behave, these make life much more complicated.

In the news recently we have heard about Emma Raducanu who at eighteen and in only her second major tennis tournament won the US open going through from the qualifying rounds to win the final without dropping a set.

The stuff of movies, the stuff of dreams. In the media much has been made of how this will motivate others to do the same.

Yes that is possible, but I would suggest highly unlikely.

Mainly as most of us don’t have the innate talent and abilities that she has and probably don’t have the single mindedness and discipline required either.

But we do all have our own skills which to us may seem to be very little but which to others are often something they cannot attain.

I have never been able to draw or paint, my grandad could, he was very good, in trying to help me he used to say, just draw what you see, it never worked for me though.

If we don’t win some major prize or reach a high position or become a pop star, does that mean we have failed. Social media might imply that but I am sure that is not a view Jesus would subscribe to, and nor should we.

If anyone wishes to be first he must be last and the servant of all.

A hard message to hear, and an even harder one to live by, especially in our modern age where we tend to think we are measured by our wealth or our possessions.

That constant conflict is with us all as human beings and why we need to keep looking to Christ not only for what we should do but also for the strength to help us do it.

And so we come to the last two verses where Jesus makes it clear what he expects of us.

I said earlier that we are born unable to do much, we need the help of others, particularly our parents, to help us get through each day and to grow and develop.

What Jesus is suggesting is that we approach everyone with a view to how we can help them, how we can reposed to their needs, not look to how they can help us.

That doesn’t mean that we should treat others a though they are children and we know what is best for them.

But it does mean that we should value them, allow them to grow and develop, and try to recognise and respond to their needs as best we can, but also help them to know the love and support which is there for them in Christ Jesus.

So three main points to take from this passage;

Jesus is the son of God who came to show us God’s love and what he expects of us and also that death is not the end.

That we are all human and get things wrong at times, but that there is hope for us all.

And that being important is not important, knowing the love of God and helping others come to know that too is what is really important.