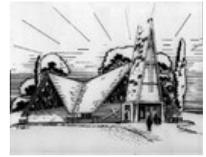




Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon- 18th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 20B)

Who is the Greatest?



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mk 9, 30-37:

- ³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know,
- ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise."
- ³² But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.
- ³³ 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 (on) my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

• **Let us pray:** *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Embrace us with Your life-giving Word so that we will embrace others in Your Name and welcome them in our midst! Amen.*

• **Dear beloved of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!**

- What a beautiful picture to behold: Jesus took a child and set him in the midst of His disciples. Jesus embraced this little child. He put His arms around the child. Then He spoke to His disciples. This includes us.
- And it is quite a Word He speaks to them. Whoever of the disciples receives such a child in Jesus name, because of who Jesus is and what He is doing, His Mission, would receive not only the child, but Jesus and God the Father who sent Him!
- Receiving the "little ones" into the Body of Christ is no small thing! That is receiving Jesus and the One who sent Him into our midst.
- What about a child? Why a little child? Anyone who wants to be the greater Christian should be least of all, should become the servant of ALL. Servant of ALL includes

serving the weakest infant, which is completely dependent on others. In God's Kingdom the One who serves ALL is the greatest. And that is why receiving the weakest ones, the "little ones", the poor in the Spirit, is receiving Jesus and the One who sent Christ, namely God the Father.

- This of course speaks for baptising children, because in Baptism the person baptised is baptised into the Body of Christ on account of His Name. On account of who He is, and what He did for all nations. This in particular includes all "little ones" who have nothing to offer to God, who depend on the Grace of God as a gift completely.

- It is important to note that Jesus did this very thing when He called His disciples! He often referred to them as being "little ones", "O you of little faith". He called them without any merit on their side. And throughout the Gospel we see who such "little ones" are and what they do as they follow Jesus.

- First of all, they need to be taught! They don't know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. They don't understand, not initially, on what mission Jesus is. When three of them are called by Jesus to climb with Him on the mountain where Jesus is transfigured before them, not long afterwards an argument breaks out amongst the disciples, who is the greater one! O you little ones. Yes, they need to be taught, because they don't know, because they are indeed poor in the spirit!

- If three out of twelve see things others have not seen, or experience things others have not experienced, it does not mean that those three are greater ones! Take the apostle Peter for instance, he was present at Jesus' transfiguration. What happened to him when he was tested when Jesus was led away to be judged and crucified? Did he manage to follow Jesus as he said, he would do? [Mk 14,29] *"Even though they all fall away, I will not!"* - his famous last words before he denied Jesus three times in a row!

- Dear congregation, those are the little ones Jesus is speaking of here. Were they good people, and therefore Jesus called them? No, it is not true that we should surround ourselves only with good and successful people in the church, as it is boldly preached. Do not receive the weird, or those who are at times boastful, or those who don't know, the weak ones, who fall often, the ones who criticise too quickly, the ones who judge others, the ones who are politically incorrect- stay away from all those

because they will just tarnish the image of the congregation. 'Don't let anyone see that you are travelling with such as these.'

- Please realise, Jesus is not referring to children, because they are innocent, as is often misunderstood. Whoever does not bring up children with strict discipline and good example will as a result get unbearable persons. If you just leave them, they will not behave by themselves.
- No. Jesus uses children as example, because they constantly need service! They need to be served. You cannot let them alone. They need to be served, forgiven, reprimanded, saved from many dangers, need to be driven to the hospital, they need an open ear- they are in need of service all the time!
- Such are the "little ones" in the congregation. They need the constant care of the congregation, they need our prayers, our money, our teaching, our assistance all the time. But those awkward "little ones" who draw so much service from everyone, who quite frankly burden the congregation, those are the ones Jesus places into our midst and says, if you receive anyone of these, you not only receive Me, you also receive the heavenly Father.
- So, please, receiving the "little ones" adds up to sacrificing your time and life for the sake of others. Don't think its pleasant for our old Adam. Don't think this will increase the image of the church before the world. If you associate with politically incorrect sinners, you will be cast out by the world and especially social media. Jesus speaks of real sinners here! Sinners are difficult to handle, difficult to accept!
- And if you are now uneasy with this teaching and say to yourselves, how is this possible? This is going too far. I can't do this. This is too much for me, to really live like this and to accept and deal with all these true sinners!
- This takes us to the beginning of our passage for today [30-32]: "*They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And He (Jesus) did not want anyone to know, for He was teaching His disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him.*"

- Do you understand this saying, ... that Jesus needed to die for you and for me, ... and for all the “little ones”! Jesus is the Greatest One. He really is. Its not an empty phrase to try and flatter Him. He really is the Greatest ONE, because He became the very Least for all “little ones”. And that includes you and me. And that was not a walk in the park either. He was burdened with our transgressions. I, you, have been high maintenance for Him. Yet, He carried it willingly. He was forsaken on our behalf.
 - Without this act of sacrifice- that is what love is, sacrificing yourself for the benefit of the one who does not deserve anything of it- without this act, Jesus’ teaching would have no power.
 - However, because of Him fulfilling the true sacrifice God had in mind, His teaching is powerful. It inspires us to begin to do as He says.
 - See, how beautiful it is: He called us into His arms, through the service of His servants. We were received by Jesus’ servants in His Body, in His Name, and hence Jesus Himself embraced us in Baptism. Then Jesus used His servants to teach us so that we will become servants ourselves willing to make the sacrifices necessary to receive others in His name!
 - In Baptism He embraced us and then He teaches us through the same servants of His Body so that we will embrace other “little ones” who are still outside. We have been received in His name to receive others in His name. They need our service, our teaching and support including sacrifices so that they will become those who are willing to receive even others.
 - Although real sacrifices go like a golden thread through all generations of Christ’s Body sacrifices will come to an end when the whole Body will go where the Head is already, namely in the resurrected life, at the end of time. Then all burdens, tears and sins will finally be removed from us. We may look forward to *that* Day of the LORD.
- Amen.**
- Glory be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
 - *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. [NKJ 2 Cor3:14.]*