

Pentecost 13 9/7/14
Matthew 18:1-20 18A

“UNLESS YOU TURN AND BECOME LIKE CHILDREN, YOU WILL NEVER ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.”

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus.” Kind of makes you wonder, doesn't it – exactly what time was “that time”? The way Matthew says it in His Gospel “that time” was the time Peter, James, and John were feeling really good about themselves. They were filled with pride. They had left home, family, and business to follow Jesus. They were the ones, after all, who got to go up the mountain and see Jesus transfigured. They got to see Moses and Elijah with their own eyes and hear Jesus talk to them. More than that, they heard the voice of God with their own ears, say, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him (Mt 17).” All of that was making them feel very, very special.

In fact, all twelve of the disciples were feeling very special at that time. And, why shouldn't they? Jesus had called them brothers. He called them to Himself and sent them out to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He gave them authority to cast out demons, heal the sick. When He sent them out, He told them not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And that's exactly what they did. They went out, they proclaimed, they cast out, they healed, and they came back, feeling really good about themselves.

So, are you starting to see what time “that time” is? It's the time when the disciples were walking around with the chests puffed out, they were strutting like peacocks, feeling high and mighty, and proud and great, because they're the ones, they're the great ones.

That sheds light on the question they ask Jesus. When the disciples came to Jesus to ask that question, “Who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven,?” they were betting the farm that it wouldn’t be Moses or Elijah or King David; that Jesus will not answer, “My mother, Mary, or John the Baptist.” No, when they ask Jesus that question, they expect Him to answer one of them. Why wouldn’t it be one of them? Look at what they’ve done: they’ve left home and family to follow Him. They’re out, proclaiming the Kingdom of heaven. They’re casting our demons, healing lepers, even raising the dead.

When that question gets asked, you know Peter was hoping the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was going to be ... Peter. Matthew had his fingers crossed, hoping and praying that Jesus would pick him. James had the plans drawn up for his throne, so it could be built and placed right next to the throne of Jesus in heaven. And, John hoping that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was spelled -- “J-O-H-N.” That’s what the disciples were thinking “at that time.”

Funny thing, though. Jesus isn’t thinking like that at all. Before the Savior answers them a word, He called a child to Himself and placed that child in the midst of them. From the words Matthew uses, that child is most likely no more than two years old, a toddler. Jesus sets that toddler before them and then says this: “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom.”

How do you like those apples? A little child, a toddler? Jesus says that is greatness is the kingdom of heaven and we don’t like that at all. That doesn’t make any sense. That’s not the way the world works. Take a look around and see who the great ones in the world are. The great ones

in the world are the one who do great things. They throw touchdown passes. They make buzzer-beating jump shots. They are the ones who are smarter, sharper, who work night and day, forsaking all, so that they can become the CEO's and company presidents.

Great ones do great things. That's the way it works in the world, but that's not the way it works in the kingdom of heaven. Last Sunday, we talked about the Great Reversal of the Christian life. We see it again this Sunday. That's why Jesus takes that toddler and sets it right in the midst of the disciples, for them to see. Take a look at that child and what do you see? You certainly do not see someone who has left home and family; who has gone out to proclaim the kingdom of heaven; you don't see someone who has something to brag or boast about. Instead, what you see is a child, someone completely dependent upon someone else to take care of them. You see someone who trusts someone else is going to feed and clothe them, and protect them from all harm and danger. You see someone who has completely and totally entrusted themselves to someone else's watching. That's what you see in that toddler – humility, trust. That, Jesus says, makes you the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

So that you would even be able to enter into heaven, God send His own Son as a child into our midst. Take a look at that child as He lies in a manger on a cold Judean night. There He is – trusting His mother and Joseph will feed Him, clothe Him, and take care of Him.

Look at Him as He is grown up and goes into the wilderness to battle the devil for you. There, for 40 days and 40 nights, He doesn't eat; He just endures the lies, the temptations of the devil. He makes no boast; He doesn't brag. He simply and humbly trusts His Father in heaven to protect Him, to see Him through so that He can continue His mission to the cross.

Look at Him as gets to Golgotha. And notice what He's carrying – He's carrying your greatness, your smugness, your self-righteousness that condemns your neighbor because you think you're greater than they are.

Look at Him as He hangs on the cross. He doesn't yell out for all to hear, "I am the greatest of all time." No, what you hear from that cross is the humble cry of a child, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit," and with that, He dies. He dies so that you will have the forgiveness of all your sins and you will be raised from the death of your sin.

The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus takes away all of your self-proclaimed greatness and all of your self-righteousness and replaces it with His greatness and His perfection.

For most of us, that happened when we were children, infants, with nothing to brag or boast about, when at the font of baptism, Jesus washed us clean, and gave us all His good gifts, especially deliverance from death and the devil, eternal life, and faith. To even get into heaven, one must have child-like humility, child-like trust in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit above anything else. So, God gives you faith, simple, humble child-like trust that in and through Jesus, you have the forgiveness of all your sins, heaven has been opened to you, and that God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will provide for you and care for you, at all times, and in all places.

Today is Education Rally Sunday. You know my favorite question to ask as your pastor, right? "Why? – why do we do what we do?" Why do we have Sunday School? Well, I suppose you could answer, "Because we've always done it that way." The best answer is so that the children hear and learn of Jesus, that the faith He began at their baptism, would grow, and become strong, so that they would trust, in the good days and

the bad, that Jesus will always hold them in the palm of His hand until that time that He comes to take them to heaven to be with Him.

At that time, they asked Jesus, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

At **this** time, we know who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is -- The one who trusts in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with humble, child-like faith.