

Pentecost 14                    9/10/17  
 Matthew 18:1-20                18A  
 Rally Day

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

A group of staid and stately Englishman, complete with umbrellas and bowler hats, happened upon a group of American university students playing frisbee in Hyde Park, London, England. This being the 1960's, they had never seen a frisbee before, so they watched with great interest, for some time. Finally, one of them walked up to the Americans, and said, “Excuse me. I don't mean to interrupt your game, but we cannot figure out who is winning.”

It almost seems like is it just a part of our human nature that there has to be a winner and a loser. The disciples sure wanted to win.

The 12 thought of themselves as more deserving of God's favor. In the folly of sinful reasoning, the disciples, like all sinful reasoning, did not see their sin and their inability to save themselves. LIKE CHILDREN ARE HELPLESS TO CARE FOR THEMSELVES, WE CANNOT EARN GOD'S FAVOR AND FORGIVENESS. AS SOMEONE MUST DO EVERYTHING FOR A CHILD, JESUS MUST DO EVERYTHING FOR US.

You may recall from last week, that in the verses preceding our lesson today, Jesus had poured out His heart to them concerning His suffering, death, and resurrection, and what do the disciples do? They “came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’” (v. 1).

I. THE DESIRE FOR POWER HAS BEEN AT THE ROOT OF SIN FROM THE BEGINNING. “The serpent said to the woman, ‘You shall not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be

opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4-5). “You will be like God.” Here is the serpent tempting Eve with the lie that she could be as great as God Himself.

The first murder is a similar story. “The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell” (Gen 4:4b-50). Cain perceived that Abel was greater in the Kingdom of heaven. However, instead of repenting, “Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him” (Gen 4:8b). Cain attempted to make himself greater in the kingdom of heaven by eliminating the competition.

Consider the history of mankind. How many people have shed blood and died because someone ... somewhere ... wanted to be the greatest ... wanted to have the most power? How many families, marriages, and congregations have been torn apart because someone just had to be the greatest?

Notice what Jesus does in response to the disciples’ question. Their question about who is the greatest simply assumes that they will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus’ response causes them – and us -- to rethink that assumption. Instead of being worried about becoming the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus wants us to focus on **entering** the kingdom of heaven.

The disciples – and we, as well – needed to learn an important lesson. “Calling... a child, He put him in the midst of them and said, ‘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 of heaven’.”

What is the lesson Jesus is teaching us? Children can do nothing for

themselves. They are totally dependent on someone else for life. Children cannot feed themselves. Children cannot wash and dry their clothes and clothe themselves. Children cannot bathe and dry themselves. Children are totally helpless to help themselves. If a child is to live and survive, somebody else must do everything for them.

Saints of God, the lesson Jesus is teaching us in the example of a little child is, that just as children are helpless to do anything for themselves, we are helpless to do anything for ourselves in the kingdom of God. We cannot earn God's grace nor favor. We cannot save ourselves by our works. Just as someone must do everything for the child, so someone must do everything for us.

II. WE REJOICE THAT JESUS MADE HIMSELF THE LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN TO SAVE US. The Bible says of Jesus,

“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name (Ph 2).

Jesus emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant to take on our sin and its wages of death. That's what He did upon the cross – He died so that we would be forgiven all of our sin and the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, He rose bringing life and immortality to light for us.

III. In our Old Testament lesson, God says to Ezekiel, “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me” (Ez 33:7). You, baptized child of God, ARE A WATCHMAN TO THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. Jesus says the same thing to us in our Gospel, “Whoever

receives one such child in My name receives Me...See that you do not despise one of these little ones” (v. 5, 10). To receive your neighbor as a child is to see them as someone who cannot get into heaven by themselves. To receive your neighbor as a child means to share Christ with them, to teach them all things that He has taught us.

Today, we celebrate Christian Education Rally Sunday, marking the beginning of Sunday and Catechism instruction for our young people. But, of course, hearing and learning God’s Word do not end once we are confirmed. That is why we have LWML, Adult Bible class, we read and learn God’s Word every day. But, we all know the challenge for us in that, don’t we?

This past week at Bible class, one of the ladies brought in the little story that is in your bulletin this morning. We are in the world, and for too often, we are of the world, so that we begin to think this world, as we know it today, is our home and we are in no hurry to learn God’s Word or teach it to our children.

But, Dear Saints of God, every wildfire, hurricane, earthquake, every war and rumor of war is a call to repentance, reminding us that this earth is not our home. So we pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” that we may have the heart of Christ Himself and bring the children – of all ages – to Jesus.