

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Old Testament: Jeremiah 11:18-20.

Epistle: James 3:13 - 4:10.

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Mark 9:30-37.

30 They left that place and were passing through Galilee, and Jesus did not want anyone to know about it. 31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them: “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, but after He has been killed, He will rise on the third day.”

32 They did not understand what He said, and they were afraid to ask Him.

33 Then they came to Capernaum. When He had come into the house, He asked them, “What were you discussing on the road?”

34 They kept quiet. For on the road they had been discussing who the greatest was. 35 Jesus sat down and called the Twelve. He told them, “If anyone wants to be the first, he must be the last of all, and the servant of all!”

36 He took a little child and set him among them. He put His arms around him and told them,

37 “Whoever welcomes one of the little children like this one in My name welcomes Me. Whoever welcomes Me welcomes not Me but the One who has sent Me.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

As we now make our way through the Gospel according to Mark, there is a change in focus. In fact, all four Gospel accounts have this change of focus. The beginning of the Gospel accounts focus on the teachings and signs that point to Jesus as the promised Messiah. These signs and teachings all fulfill the promises that He made through His prophets in the Old Testament. They certify that Jesus really is the Messiah sent from God. They make Him known to the multitudes.

There comes a point, however, when there is a change in focus as Jesus began to prepare His disciples for Good Friday. Over the past few Sundays, we have heard that Jesus began to seek solitude so that He could teach His disciples in a more private setting. He spent more time in Gentile territory in order to get away from the crowds. He still performed the signs, and He still proclaimed the Gospel, but His main focus from now on would be on preparing the disciples for His upcoming suffering, death, and resurrection. That's the reason He went to the areas of Tyre and Sidon, Caesarea Philippi, and the Decapolis. That's the reason today's reading from Mark's account of the Gospel begins with the words: **They left that place and were passing through Galilee, and Jesus did not want anyone to know about it. 31 For He was teaching His disciples.”**

All four Gospel accounts make it very clear that Jesus prepared His disciples for Good Friday by regularly teaching them about His upcoming suffering, death, and resurrection. Today's reading makes that very clear. 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, but after He has been killed, He will rise on the third day.”** This is the focus of His teaching during those times when He had them by themselves.

Now, although Jesus was being very clear, the disciples were not catching on. Today's reading informs us that **“They did not understand what He said, and they were afraid to ask Him.”** This must have been very frustrating for Jesus, but before we get too hard on the disciples, remember that no one had ever done this before. There are accounts in the Old Testament of prophets raising OTHER people from the dead. Jesus Himself had raised people from the dead, but no one had come back from the dead under his own power. This was totally outside the disciples' experience. It wasn't that they didn't want to understand Jesus, but they simply did not have the mental, emotional, or spiritual abilities they needed to understand what Jesus said. And I don't think that we would have been any different if we had been there at that time.

After the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to record Jesus' teaching, He then inspired Mark to give an example of how clueless the disciples really were. We not only hear that the disciples did not understand, but we also have a record of an incident that demonstrated how much they didn't understand. The disciples were debating among themselves about who was the greatest in the kingdom.

Think about it. When Jesus prayed to the Father in Gethsemane, He sweat drops of blood. Nevertheless, when He shared this fate with His disciples, their response was to discuss who was the greatest. Jesus was telling them about the single greatest event in the entire history of the world ... salvation earned on the cross for all people. And they were debating who would be the leader of their little band when Jesus was gone. How embarrassing it must have been when Jesus asked them, **“What were you discussing on the road?”**

Jesus used this moment of embarrassment as an opportunity to teach them and us what it means to be a leader in His church. He sat down and called the twelve. And He said to them, **“If anyone wants to be the first, he must be the last of all, and the servant of all!”** In God's family, the leader serves. The one who is the highest makes himself the lowest. The leader in God's family sacrifices not to get power, but to serve others.

Then to emphasize His point, "He took a little child and set him among them. He put His arms around him and told them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one of the little children like this one in My name welcomes Me. Whoever welcomes Me welcomes not Me but the One who has sent Me. Jesus connected the child to Himself and then connected both Himself and the child to our Father in Heaven. To receive a child is to receive God the Father Almighty.

The Greek word that is translated as child indicates a child whose age would be somewhere between pre-school and second grade. At that age most children can feed themselves, get dressed, understand simple sentences, and so on, but we are still talking about an age when children still need a lot of help just to survive. This child can do a few things for himself, but for the most part, this child is pretty much helpless. The greatest serves the most helpless.

This is pretty much the opposite of the way the world thinks. From the time that Adam and Eve sinned until now, people have wanted power and control. People have thought that the greatest people are in control of other people and have them to serve. If we look at the other readings for today, we see that each of them talks about the problems we have because we always want people to serve us. In the Old Testament Lesson, people want to kill Jeremiah. In our epistle, James considers the reasons people fight. Through the entire Bible, people have had trouble with greed, power, and control.

We aren't much different today. Our culture praises people who are the best. Who are beautiful? Who are strong? Who are wealthy? Who has the most power? Who is the best cricketer? Who is the best footballer? Sooner or later, we all fall into this temptation. We all want people to serve us and think that we're important.

The desire to be important doesn't change with time. It's the reason Cain killed Abel and it's the reason a gunmen terrorize people all over the world! It's a deep part of our sinful nature. It attacks us from the day we enter the world until the day we die. So - the things Jesus teaches His disciples are good for us also.

Sadly, today's gospel is not the only time the disciples argued about who was the greatest in God's kingdom. There was a time that Jesus told the disciples to go to a friend's house and prepare for the Passover. When everyone arrived, the disciples began discussing who should wash the feet. You see they had been walking in the hot sun all day. Their feet were hot, sweaty, and dirty. It was the tradition for the host to have a servant wash the feet of His guests. None of the disciples wanted to do a servant's work so no one was washing any feet. Then Jesus arrived and He washed their feet. It was one more way that He showed how to be humble and serve them.

Jesus continued to show service to the disciples and us beginning that very evening. He served you and me by allowing a band of soldiers to arrest Him so that He could endure a day of torture and shame as He took our sin to Himself and carried it to a cross and to death. He served you and me by enduring God's holy

wrath against our sin while He hung on that cross. He served you and me after His friends laid Him in a tomb by rising from the dead and proclaiming His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Jesus said that the greatest is the servant of all. Jesus is the greatest of all because He served the entire world by offering Himself up as the atonement for all the sins of the world. Jesus still serves us as the Holy Spirit gives us forgiveness by the Gospel ... the Gospel we hear in the Absolution and in preaching ... the Gospel combined with the water of Holy Baptism ... the Gospel combined with bread and wine as Jesus Himself enters us with His forgiveness, - one mouth at a time.

Jesus, the greatest, serves us who are the most helpless ... helpless in sin and facing death. We who would be great in our greed receive the generosity of a saviour who serves. Now that Jesus has served us with the ultimate service, He is able to work through us to serve others. He gives us the power to share His service with the people in our lives.

Ultimately, it's the desire of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ to serve us with new, holy bodies that will rise from the dead just as He rose. On that day of resurrection, we will serve one another in perfect harmony and joy. Our service will be so perfect that it won't even cross our minds to ask who is the greatest.

Amen

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer of the Church 18th Sunday after Pentecost

P In joyful confidence that our heavenly Father hears our requests and answers them according to His good and gracious will, let us pray for the Church, the flock redeemed by Christ the crucified, and for the needs of all people.

Brief Silence

P Gracious God and Father, You have established Your holy church to proclaim life and salvation to a world dominated by unbelief. Send faithful pastors, to us at the AELC, the harvest is ripe but the workers are few, bless our lay people and teachers, and other servants to hold high the cross of Christ that through the life-giving work of Your Spirit that we may be led to confess Jesus as Lord.... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Gracious God and Father, You had commanded us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us.

Grant us wisdom to speak well of others, even though they may speak ill of us, that our hearts may be ruled by humility as we joyfully follow the example of Your dear Son, who came not to be served, but to serve us all.... Lord in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Gracious God and Father, grant us upright and faithful rulers who seek to fulfill their duties as leaders of our nation, states, and communities. Protect them from the temptations of power and greed, and mould them into wise and caring servants who work for the betterment of our society.... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Father of all compassion, be the strength for doctors, nurses, hospice care workers, and all who work to restore our health or care for us before death, and for those who protect us the police, state emergency workers, fire fighters and our army personal and their families, that they may be given wisdom, skill, and maintain a compassion for their tasks.... Lord in your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Gracious God and Father, uphold and strengthen all those who endure the pain of injury and disease [especially remembering Percy Manz and Conrad Behrendorff and their families who are going through a difficult time]. Dispel all fear, silence any doubt, and, according to Your gracious will, grant healing and restoration, so that the sick may find renewed vigour to serve You and the neighbour.... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Gracious God and Father, at Your invitation we joyfully gather around the banquet table of Your Son Jesus to feast on His life-giving body and blood. Grant us the sure confidence of sins forgiven and fellowship restored within the body of Your Son, the Church... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Father, the Source of all life and the life that never ends, help us in our unbelief, and receive our prayers this day that we offer to You in the name of Your beloved Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen. 500,