

SERMON FOR SUN. SEPT. 19, 2021

Pent 17B Mark 9:30—37 “Great Children.”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, in today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus is teaching His disciples about the cross. He said, **“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.”**

Jesus is teaching them about what it means for Him to be the long-awaited Messiah. It’s a crucial lesson because, without the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christianity is just another law based, moralistic religion.

And so, all Christian teaching finds its beginning and ending in the cross of Christ. For there on the cross is God for you. His power, greatness, glory, and love are made perfect in weakness.

Since that is not how we are used to thinking about power and greatness, we need to be taught about true power. More than that - we need to have this truth *implanted* into our hearts.

Mere knowledge is not enough, for faith and life are not just of the mind but also of the heart. We often know what we *should* do, but don’t do it! We need a change of heart, that what we know in our minds might also be reflected in our lives.

So Jesus taught His disciples. They’d shown how much they need this teaching, for, on the way to Capernaum, they’d been arguing amongst themselves: ***Who is the greatest?*** Not surprisingly, they all wanted to be.

They didn’t understand true greatness but were operating from a worldly mindset of what constitutes greatness.

So Jesus brings a child before them and says: ***servicing this child - that is greatness. Why? Because that’s agape, loving those who can’t do anything for you.***

Now that’s certainly not how the world defines greatness, where parenting is regarded as secondary to career, and teachers are among the lowest paid professionals.

Serving children doesn't get you much in return. It is a labor of love, and thus a picture of what Jesus came to do for you.

Indeed, Jesus is the answer to the disciple's argument of who is the greatest among them, and He demonstrates His greatness by serving them as a labor of love.

He is the Son of God who made Himself the least of all and the servant of all. Jesus served the least, the lowest, the outcast, the sinner, little children, and those twelve who were arguing that day about who was the greatest.

Jesus comes in humility and compassion to serve us, His helpless children. He came to forfeit His life that we might have life.

And so Jesus teaches the 12 about the cross, for that is how He has come to serve you. The cross is not *part* of His service for you; it is His service for you.

The cross is not just an unhappy ending to our heroic Lord's life. Nails didn't hold him to the cross; it was His love for you.

The cross is why He is born; it is why He lives. All His words and work and life lead to the cross. That in His death we could be reconciled, our sins forgiven and thus share in his eternal life.

In His death is our life, for, on the cross Jesus makes atonement for our life-stealing sins. On the cross, He dies the death we deserve. On the cross, He reconciles us to His Father.

How do we know we've been reconciled and have peace with God? Because ***after three days He [did] rise*** from the dead. His resurrection is the proof that the Father had accepted Jesus' atoning sacrifice for our sins.

For where there is no more sin, there is no more death.

And where there is no more sin, then that which separated us from God is gone, and we are reconciled.

And if sin and death and our separation from God are taken care of, then our life has been restored.

The disciples didn't understand this, and Mark tells us, they were afraid to ask. For like all fallen sinners, their minds operated on the world's definition of greatness.

To them, greatness and suffering were opposites. But to Jesus, the two are one.

We too need to learn to see this greatness, this oneness. We need the cross implanted in our hearts.

We need the cross to put to death our old way of thinking, our old way of living, our old ways period. That we might live a new life as a child of God.

Now, maybe your childhood was not a happy one; perhaps your childhood was stolen from you too soon.

But your heavenly Father wants to give this life back to you. To restore what was either taken from you, or that you left behind, or never had at all.

To be a child who isn't worried about who among their friends is the greatest, but is just a kid.

A child who doesn't worry about the bills, their falling short once again of God's will, or their health late at night.

We have a Father who is greater than all those things and has promised to provide all that we truly need.

God's children enjoy the wonders of creation, not for what we can get out of them, but simply because they are their heavenly Father's handiwork. It would be great to have such care-free days again, wouldn't it?

Well, that is the life that your Heavenly Father wants for you; the life the Son of God came to provide for you; and the life that the Holy Spirit is here to give to you. Life as a child of God.

That through the fruits of the cross of Christ the old you would be put to death, and a new you be born again.

And that's what happens here in church. In the waters of **Holy Baptism**, the old you be drowned and die, and a new you be raised and born again.

Through **Holy Absolution**, all the sins and doubts and fears that haunt you be chased away by His loving embrace and the tender words of His love: ***I forgive you all your sins.***

And in ***Holy Communion***, we come and eat and drink the fruits of the cross that give us life - Jesus' own body and blood.

The food of the new creation. The food of those born again to a new life. The food that nourishes and strengthens us to live as children of God.

That is the greatness that has been given to you as a child of God; greatness that cannot be earned, only freely given to you by He who truly is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus now invites you to be what He's called you to be, great children of God. Not worrying about tomorrow, not worrying about greatness, but living in His love and giving His love to your neighbors.

It's that easy, and it's that hard.

Yes hard, because the wisdom and ways of the world have been so ingrained in us, that we strive for recognition, power, and glory, as the world does.

Yet striving for ourselves robs us of joy and life.

That's why we need to learn about the power and glory of the cross all our lives.

So, you see, the catechism isn't just *for* children, *but to make us great children!*

For when we learn of the cross and have it implanted into our hearts, Christ grows in us, and we in Him.

So in the Spirit's power, may we live always as children of God, in the safety of His house, and in the security of His forgiveness and love.

And so brothers and sisters, rejoice and be glad for there is nothing greater than to be declared a child of God and given the Spirit so that we can live as one. AMEN