

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost/September 10, 2017
Matt 18:1-20/Jesus' Little Ones
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Deacon Jerry Stobaugh

“Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

The Gospel today is very rich in a wide variety of topics: the serious nature of sin, the generosity of God's forgiveness, the love God has for His little ones, and the serious consequences of leading His little ones astray. Of all these topics, the one topic that seems to underlie most of the Lord's teaching is Jesus' little ones.

The Gospel begins with one of those teachable moments where the disciples plant their feet firmly in their mouths and ask Jesus a question. They came saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” This tells us the disciples don't get it. They are still trying to figure out which post they will have in Jesus' cabinet once He takes over.

Jesus' teaching defuses this kind of thinking by calling a child and putting it in the midst of them saying, “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.” Jesus did not choose one of the disciples, but a child. Here Jesus teaches the one who is humble like a child is the greatest in the Kingdom.

As we proceed through the rest the reading, Jesus expands on His teaching about children. “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of

the sea.” That is serious as the millstone Jesus describes here needs a donkey to turn it and would weigh more than a ton.

Jesus also said, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Even as Jesus tells the story of searching for the one lost sheep out of one hundred, He tells us, “So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” When Jesus talks of the little ones, He is of course, talking about those who are biologically young. Even so, this also applies to those who are young in the faith, which is new believers no matter what their age.

God has always given a high priority to learning His word and in passing that Word on to the next generation. In the Law we read, [Deut 6:6-9] “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Also in the Book of Proverbs, [Prov 22:6] “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” Later in Matthew we read, [Matt 28:19-20] “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

What value did the early church place on teaching the things of God? In Acts 20, we have an example of a church service that lasted from sundown to daybreak. Of course the Apostle Paul was the preacher, but this indicates the hunger people had for the Word of God.

There was a time when people were hungry for God's Word, but much has changed from those days. In modern times, we often don't have time for even an hour of bible study once a week. Children are so busy with other interest, they don't have time for even a one hour church service on a regular basis. This is a problem throughout this nation. People claim to be Christians, but few attend a church service regularly and an even much smaller group attends Bible Class regularly. What are the results of starving the soul this way?

We too must confess that we are lukewarm. We do not study God's word as we should. We have not confessed our faith to our children. We have not seen to it that we or our children get the daily requirement of God's Word. Actions speak louder than words and with our actions we teach our children God gets our leftover time if any instead of the first fruits of our day. We have led Christ's little ones astray and deserve worse than drowning in the deepest sea with a millstone around our neck.

Between our poor confession and our non-existent example, is it any wonder kids sometimes say God is not that important to them? Is it any wonder recent generations search for a church based on the entertainment value of the music instead of the church's faithfulness to Christ Jesus? Is it any wonder children get confirmed and we never hear from them again?

We all deserve eternal punishment for the way we have not passed our faith on to the next generation. What is to become of us?

Thanks be to God, Jesus invites us to become like little ones ourselves. Jesus does not let us drown with a millstone around our necks. Instead he invites us to trust in Him the way little ones trust their beloved parents. He invites us to relax in Him and let Him take

the millstone onto Himself. He reminds us to look at the cross and see not only the millstone we each deserve, but also the punishment for all our other sins as well. He invites us to see He is the Christ who takes away our sin. Indeed, He is the Christ who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus Christ comes to us as the one who suffered, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. He comes to us in His Word. He also comes to us in the sacrament as He Himself gives us of His own body and blood in, with and under these forms of bread and wine. We are His little ones; His precious children.

He has so much to share with you. So many gifts He longs to give to you while you live here on this earth in this time. Through His word, He continues to offer these gifts to you and to your children. He is ever ready to care for His little ones. Yes, both the young and the old.