

The Welcome of a Little Child 16 Pentecost B

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me but the One who sent me.” In a wonderful way that only our Savior can, He takes a simple example – that of a child and defuses a rift among His disciples. What was Jesus trying to tell His disciples?

The disciples got into that trap of comparing each one against the other based on what they thought to be “great.” Greatness is very subjective and arbitrary. Someone’s title is also a way that people measure each other and generally produces a set of expectations. Everyone has different opinions on what gives a person status, or makes them important.

The disciples argued among themselves because greatness eluded them. So did the idea of serving one another! They worried too much about who was great rather than welcoming each other without question. Welcoming a stranger on the basis of greatness is pretty shallow. Then their teacher showed them a child. What lesson was Jesus trying to teach them? The action of welcoming a child into His arms is all Jesus did.

This child in Jesus' arms told volumes about the God that sent their Messiah to them. To welcome a child was to open themselves to true greatness. It opened them to God, who welcomes *everyone* not based on some human measurement. He does not put a value on status or titles. Nor does he care if we are wealthy. God welcomes all His children for He made them in His image.

How do we welcome others into our lives?

A few weeks ago, I was invited to attend a get-together for people in the Arts. There were lots of "important" people there...milling around chatting and laughing. The person who invited me took me over to two other people I did know. I am not a bashful person. After dealing with all walks of life in the Navy...but I admit, that I felt totally out of place and alone (*perhaps my collar scared them*). The point I am trying to make is, how do we tune into new people in our church? Do we only speak to them if WE feel comfortable....instead of trying to make THEM comfortable? Are we more apt to talk to them if we think they are "ready" to talk to us?

Have you ever been in the presence of what you perceived as greatness? I think few of us can say they've met such a person. The trust and faith of a child may be the greatest thing we can know. A child is the image of welcome. Children welcome everyone without judgment unless taught otherwise. Jesus showed them that He would choose a child over adult greatness any day!

The letter of James asks whether we know what the source of arguments is. The letter says it is from cravings that are at war within. It follows this with writing that there is a failure to ask for what we need. What did the disciples need, that they argued so among themselves? Was there a basic need to be accepted and loved?

The scriptures tell us that we are to accept others " as a child would"...openly; without question or judgment. And that all of us, regardless of status or income need to be accepted and loved. I ask again. How do we welcome others into our lives? How do we welcome, accept and love others in our congregation?

"Submit yourselves therefore to God," writes James. When we submit as a child that trusts implicitly, God draws near to that person. God's nature is to have faith in His people. I know that sounds odd. What I mean is, God believes in you.

Mark's gospel makes a point of writing that the disciples of Jesus Christ were afraid to ask their friend about His crucifixion. A friendship will not be able to go to the next level until one can ask a difficult question of that person. I think that what we often fear in life is to ask the question!

Is there someone you want to welcome into your life? Into your circle of friends? Why not ask them?

God is waiting for us to ask. He waits for us to welcome others as a child would.

Amen.

Children's Sermon

Hold up a T-shirt for a youth sports team and ask the children what it means. Explain that if you wear this particular shirt, it means you're a player on the team. Hold up a cap for a professional sports team, and ask what it means to wear it. Say that if you wear the cap, you're showing everyone you're a fan of the team. Then ask the children if there is anything we can do to show the world we're Christians. Listen to their suggestions. Then tell them that Jesus has a very specific suggestion. Describe how he took a little child in his arms and told his disciples, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me" (Mark 9:36-37). Emphasize that welcoming little children is the way we show the world we're Christians — it's the way we welcome both Jesus and God into our lives. Ask for some suggestions about how we can better welcome children into our worship services, our Sunday school classes, our mission projects and our fellowship activities. Point out that

welcoming children is something we all can do to show we're on Jesus' team.