

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason S. Glombicki

September 19, 2021

When Jesus put a child among the disciples in today's gospel reading, I could not help but think of the stain glass window here in our space. What that window depicts is *not* today's story. But, the window and the story both emphasize a theme we see throughout Mark's gospel. You see, in Jesus's time, children were the most subservient humans in ancient society. They had very little status, and their only redeeming quality was in their *potential* to become a future adult. That is, if that future adult would have a promising status because of their birthright, intelligence, appearance, or gender, then they had a slight amount of worth—assuming that they made it to adulthood and almost half of children didn't.<sup>1</sup> All of that is hard to stomach on the day of Elliott's baptism, but nevertheless, that's the background for today's story. Children's thoughts, ideas, perspectives, anxieties, and joys were not taken seriously in Jesus's society.

So too, our culture is not always mindful of the thoughts of children or young people in general. For example: earlier this week, a new research circulated throughout some news sources. It came from a study of 10,000 young people ages 16 to 25 from 10 countries. 45% of respondents said anxiety and distress over the climate crisis was affecting their daily life and ability to function. 77% said that the

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-25-2/commentary-on-mark-930-37-7>, <https://www.cusan.org/CUSA-Blogs/Administrators-Blog/ArtMID/446/ArticleID/607/The-Role-of-Children-in-Jesus%E2%80%99-Time>

“future is frightening.” Young people from the countries in the Global South expressed more worry about the climate crisis, with 92% in the Philippines describing the future as “frightening.” Let that sink in a moment. In the same study, 64% said governments were not doing enough to avoid a climate crisis. And, get this, nearly half of those who talked with other people about climate change said that their concerns were ignored.<sup>2</sup> In this example, it doesn’t seem like Jesus’s time and our time are all that different.

Within a culture that flippantly engages with children, Jesus drew the attention of the disciples to the child. After he took the child into his arms, he said, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” Wow. What a ginormous reversal for an adult to say that welcoming a child is welcoming an adult. And, this is the kind of thing that Jesus does time and again.

Over the last few weeks, Mark has directed our attention to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. In other words, the text is telling us what it means to learn from Jesus. Last week, Jesus responded to Peter and reminded him that sacrificing the self, the ego, and our selfishness is what it means to take up the cross. Today, Jesus mentioned his betrayal, death, and resurrection, and there the disciples were arguing. They were focusing time and attention on who was the greatest. Jesus, however, made clear that whomever the world thinks is the top dog is not the alpha in God’s world. In this reading, Jesus speaks a truth to you and to me. It’s the truth

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/14/1037023551/climate-change-children-young-adults-anxious-worried-study> , <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/14/young-people-say-climate-anxiety-is-affecting-their-daily-life.html>

that God's values and the world's values are not always aligned. For Jesus said that the most subservient have value.

In some ways, it reminds me of the show "Undercover Boss." In that show, the boss, that is the top of the totem with all the power, goes undercover to learn from those on the frontlines of their business. Oftentimes in the show, the boss comes to develop a relationship with someone who doesn't have power, access, or agency within the organization. At the end, the viewer often watches the boss realize how hard and important their workers are.

Now, I'm not going to try to compare Jesus to the undercover boss. But maybe this show is one way we can begin to imagine what Jesus is teaching us today. That is for us to first take a step back and acknowledge that how we regard *ourselves* has an impact on how we regard others.<sup>3</sup> Does that make sense? If we see ourselves as having all the knowledge and being the top of the food chain, it becomes difficult and darn near impossible to think of anything else as valuable. How we see ourselves impacts how we see everything else. If we argue, like the disciples, who is the greatest, then we're missing God's vision of the world. We're missing the ways that we can learn about God's grace from other people and creatures. We're missing the opportunity to see God's love in unexpected places.

So, as we reimagine how we are situated in the world, then we can begin to show more respect to all of creation. We can begin to realize that the flora and fauna are not here to serve us, but rather, that are a part of a well-balanced ecosystem that

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/802-17th-sunday-after-pentecost-ord-25b-sept-19-2021>

we need to preserve. We can, then, pick up one of the bags of love we made last week and engage with the person who might be homeless or in need, recognizing that they are just as valuable and deserving of respect and care. We can begin to realize that borders and boundaries don't make those in the south less than human, and so, we can advocate for policies that respect humanity as equals no matter their country of origin. You see, in this new way of seeing the world through God's eyes, we find that arguing about the greatest misses the point. Because in God's vision for the world there is no "greatest." We are all important, valuable, and created through God's spender—every pollinator, squirrel, and slimy creature. We are all essential for the abundance of life that God has created.

So, friends: as I wrap up today, we can reflect, yet again, on today's reading and our giant tent. In God's welcoming tent, there is no top or bottom bunk. Some are not more superior than others. Humans are not better than flora or fauna. Rather, our God welcomes us all into a life of abundance, where we all are loved and valued. Knowing that we matter and that we are loved, then we are invited to begin living in ways that show that love and respect to all of creation. Amen.