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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 26, 2021
18th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 11:18-20, James 3:13-18

Hymns: 235:1-3, 7; 358; 394; 52

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 9:30-37

Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *it*.³¹ For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."³² But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.

³³ Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?"³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who *would be the* greatest.³⁵ And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."³⁶ Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them,³⁷ "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Pride vs Humility

Pride and humility: it is a constant conflict between these two human qualities. Humility is far more rare than we would like to believe, while pride is more prevalent than we would like to admit. Even if we allow that we may misuse the words “proud” or “pride” sometimes, it is a very common human trait to enjoy a boost to one’s ego in the things that one has accomplished. Perhaps we could be more careful in speaking of things we have done, that we might say that we are pleased with the result of our work on a project, or that we have a real sense of accomplishment when completing a challenging task rather than taking pride in what we have done. We may want to tell our children or spouses of the love we feel for them when we say how proud we are of what they have achieved.

The word “humble” is used in some interesting ways as well. Sometimes people say they are humbled to receive an award. I can understand that they may be awed that some consider them to be on such a level that their name is associated with others who have been recognized as possessing outstanding gifts in their field. However, what is often going on is that they are actually proud to be considered among the greats in what they do, be that scientific research, the arts, or sports, or the humanities.

True humility is a rare trait, it is a trait that does come with faith as a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a trait that recognizes that it is God who has made us, given us our gifts and abilities, and granted us the opportunity to use them. He enabled us to do any good thing that we may accomplish. The glory is the Lord’s. **All** the glory is the Lord’s.

Humility, or meekness, is the quality that lies at the heart of our worship and sermon meditation this morning. So, with the Spirit’s guidance, let us consider a blessed paradox this morning:--

THEME: Humble Service: The Key to Greatness in the Kingdom of God.

We shall first look at --

I. Humble Service as Revealed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. ³¹ For He taught His disciples and said to them, ‘The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.’ ³² But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.” (Mark 9:30-32)

The time of Jesus’ public ministry was drawing to a close. There was so much that He needed to teach the disciples before He died, both to prepare them for those events, as well as prepare them for the gospel ministry that would be entrusted to them in such a short time. Jesus took the disciples off to a place where He could teach them privately about His coming death. What stands out for us is their lack of understanding. One wonders how it was possible for them not to understand when Jesus told them in plain and simple language what lay ahead for Him in the coming days.

The answer is actually quite simple as it relates to our sinful human nature. We don’t want to hear what we don’t want to hear. As a result, we fail to understand. We fail to accept the truth even when put before us in plain and simple language easy enough for a fifth grader, or for that matter a first or second grader.

Yes, the concept of rising from the dead was foreign to the disciples, but that wasn’t their biggest problem. Their biggest problem was that the truth of the gospel, the truth of the cross went against their vision of what Jesus was supposed to be about. They were looking, they were waiting, they were eager to see the glory of an earthly kingdom with Jesus reigning in Jerusalem, and the twelve of them serving beside Him! It was all about the glory, human glory, earthly, temporal glory, and national pride. They missed the point because they were blinded by their own plans and ambitions.

Jesus was about humble service. Jesus came into the world and took upon Himself our human flesh and blood so that He could die for us. He knew what lay before Him. He knew to the very core of His existence the extremes of anguish, and the depths of humiliation His mission of salvation required. And yet we read in Scripture: *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”* (1

Timothy 1:15) That was the humble service Jesus choose to fulfill for us and for our salvation. He did not turn away from the sufferings of soul and body. He did not turn away from death. *“Being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled** Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”* (Philippians 2:8) He humbled Himself and did what was necessary to save you and to save me from sin, death, and the devil. *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

(Mark 10:45)

Let us now consider --

II. Humble Service as Called for in the Christian’s Life.

What do we find recorded in our text but an accurate snapshot of human nature in all its glory, or should we say in all its shame! It is all too easy for us to be critical of the disciples and think that at least we aren’t so foolish! By nature, we are so foolish. By nature, we are just as prideful, and think of ourselves as superior or more deserving than others we see around us who are not so keen at doing the Lord’s work, or whom we judge to be less dedicated to the Lord. We dare to think we are better Christians than they are! What a bunch of foolishness! It is the same foolishness that we read about in our text because we are made of the same stuff as were the disciples, fallible flesh and blood, and a sinful old adam that deceives us each and every day of our lives. So, when we read these words let’s not only be charitable, but also ready to receive instruction about ourselves and how we ought to be ready to serve the Lord and our neighbor.

“Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, ‘What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?’³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.³⁵ And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.’³⁶ Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them,³⁷ ‘Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.’ ” (Mark 9:33-39)

What might they have been pointing to in their lives to support claims of greatness as disciples of Christ? Some of them had given up their livelihood as fishermen. Matthew gave up a very lucrative business of tax collecting for Rome. Maybe some talked about the closeness of their relationship to Jesus. Maybe others talked about their responsibilities to the group. On another occasion Peter was quick to point out how much he and his business partners had sacrificed for the Lord Jesus.

We still are drawn into this type of thinking in American Christianity, and it is not all limited to those “other churches.” It invades our thinking as well. Questions are posed such as: “Have you **come** to Christ?” “Have you dedicated **your life** to the Lord?” “Have you surrendered your will to Him?” “Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord?” Every one of those questions is founded on false ideas about the gospel and our salvation. Every one of those questions is looking inward to **me**, to **my** life, **my** dedicated faith, **my** reaching out to the Lord, **my** glory in keeping the commandments. That is what we like to do. What have I sacrificed? How often did I miss out on something, riches, fun, whatever because I was in church when YOU were having fun! Vanity! “*All is vanity and a grasping for the wind!*” (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

Jesus won my salvation! Jesus, through His death and resurrection, brought us back into oneness with God! The Holy Spirit called you to faith, so “*that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*” (Ephesians 4:24) In all these things pertaining to life and godliness we are the beneficiaries of the grace of God. Greatness and glory do not belong to me but to the Lord. If I am to learn anything from the Lord it is all about humility. In one of our hymns we pray:

*“Grant that I may willingly Bear with Thee my crosses,
Learning humbleness of thee, Peace mid pain and losses.
May I give Thee love for Love! Hear me, O my Savior,
That I may in heaven above Sing Thy praise forever.”*

(The Lutheran Hymnal 140:6)

Ah, but Jesus wasn't quite done with His lesson for us. He sat down and called a small child over to Him and picked the child up

in His arms, and taught us the lesson that the humble service of receiving a little child in Jesus' name is wonderful service indeed. It is the humble services that we perform for others, starting with kindness to little children, and teaching them about Jesus, that humble service that few will notice, that the Lord takes note of! Indeed, as we teach our **own** children (only few people will even think about this service parents perform) that is something we do for the Lord. When we receive little children in Jesus' name we receive the Lord Jesus, and as we receive the Lord Jesus we receive His heavenly Father, OUR heavenly Father.

It is not simply the physical needs we seek to satisfy for others but presenting them with the greater treasure of the gospel. We have been given the gospel to share with those who are wandering in the darkness and despair of sin. The gospel of a crucified and risen Jesus makes a real difference in this world, and in the hearts and lives of those who believe.

Our Lord has called us to serve even as He served. Our Creator God served us, His creatures and fallen sinful creatures at that. Those things that no one in the world would notice, those are the things the Lord does notice and receives as offerings of love given also to Him. This is our reasonable service. When the Lord comes, we have nothing of which to glory of greatness in ourselves. We do well to respond to the Lord as Jesus instructs us: *“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’ ”* (Luke 17:10) Even this we dare say only because we know that Jesus has forgiven and removed all our failings.

Greatness in the kingdom of God, it comes to us by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. He has called us to the honor and privilege of humble service, service that we learn from Him, and offer to His praise and glory.

*“Wisdom’s highest noblest treasure Jesus, lies concealed in Thee;
Grant that this may still the measure of my will and actions be,
Humility there and simplicity reigning,
In paths of true wisdom my steps ever training.
Oh, if I of Christ have this knowledge divine,*

The fulness of heavenly wisdom is mine.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 366:7)

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.