

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 20, 2009  
Mark 9:30-37

*"Humble Like a Child"*  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

The text for this morning allows us to share in a very private and personal time with Jesus and his twelve disciples. The words of our text follow closely on one of the high points of Jesus' earthly ministry, His transfiguration, as well as on the confession of Peter that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God. Here we see Jesus travelling with His disciples from Caesarea Philippi down through Galilee on his way to Capernaum, which was at this time considered his home town. The account of last week's Gospel of Jesus' healing the young boy possessed by an evil spirit occurs along this journey. And as he walks with them and upon their arrival at his home in Capernaum, he teaches his disciples and his discourse with them on this occasion gives us as his modern day disciples a most powerful lesson in humble service as he uses a child as an example. For indeed, that is our theme for this morning: "Humble Like A Child" as we sit and listen to the teaching of the Savior.

I. The Crucified Lord is the Basis for Service

Listen again to the opening words of the text: THEY WENT ON FROM THERE AND PASSED THROUGH GALILEE. AND HE DID NOT WANT ANYONE TO KNOW, FOR HE WAS TEACHING HIS DISCIPLES, SAYING TO THEM, "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." BUT THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE SAYING, AND WERE AFRAID TO ASK HIM. (v.30-32) Here Jesus describes the basis for service in words that are most direct. He speaks privately to his disciples about his betrayal, suffering, crucifixion and death. For as Jesus walks with his disciples on the paths through Galilee He knows full well that He is on the road to Jerusalem. It is a road on which there will be no turning back. It is a road that will lead to the greatest of humiliation and sorrow, a road that will lead to death itself. Yet it is also a way to victory. For Jesus would also teach His disciples that on the third day He would rise from the dead. And here is the basis for all discussion about service. It must start with Jesus who is the greatest servant of all--the suffering servant as Isaiah the prophet calls him. Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God who took upon Himself our flesh, who became a servant for us. It is in this most gracious work of His where we must begin to understand serving and service. For it cannot start within ourselves or with our understanding but it must come from His work, His mercy, and His grace. For all our works outside of his redeeming love are worthless. Our hearts and thoughts must be anchored in Jesus.

II. Do Not Follow the Way of Pride

Yet it is clear that the disciples were not really listening to Jesus. Our text states that they did not understand what He said and that they were also afraid to ask Jesus what He meant. But there is even clearer evidence that they did not understand. When they reached Capernaum our text continues: AND THEY CAME TO CAPERNAUM. AND WHEN HE WAS IN THE HOUSE HE ASKED THEM, "WHAT WERE YOU DISCUSSING ON THE WAY?" BUT THEY KEPT SILENT, FOR ON THE WAY THEY HAD ARGUED WITH ONE ANOTHER ABOUT WHO WAS THE GREATEST. How very predictable this was. Jesus is speaking about suffering and death but His disciples were thinking of greatness. We know from other accounts in the Gospels that the 12 were often concerned with places of power and prestige in the Messianic age to come. They believed and knew Jesus to be the Messiah but they thought of Him not in terms of His suffering but in terms of glory and power--and his establishing an earthly kingdom. And most assuredly their greatest sin at that time was pride. They were too proud to ask Jesus what He really meant and they were so proud of their place that they insisted on talking about who was to be the greatest. Pride--rightfully considered one of the seven deadly sins by the early church--is something that we all must be concerned about.

For this reason it is also very fitting that in the Epistle for this morning James writes a strong admonition and exhortation against pride. They are words we can all take to heart. FOR WHERE JEALOUSY AND SELFISH AMBITION EXIST, THERE WILL BE DISORDER AND EVERY VILE PRACTICE. (James 3:16) The words of James are strong words: WHAT CAUSES QUARRELS AND WHAT CAUSES FIGHTS AMONG YOU? IS IT NOT THIS, THAT YOUR PASSIONS ARE AT WAR WITHIN YOU? 2 YOU DESIRE AND DO NOT HAVE, SO YOU MURDER. YOU COVET AND CANNOT OBTAIN, SO YOU FIGHT AND QUARREL. YOU DO NOT HAVE, BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK. 3 YOU ASK AND DO NOT RECEIVE, BECAUSE YOU ASK WRONGLY, TO SPEND IT ON YOUR PASSIONS. (James 4:1-3) While James' words speak eloquently of the results of jealousy and selfishness especially in the world, which is self-evident, They can also be very applicable to the church. How much strife is there in the church and how much trouble is caused there because of pride? How much effort is spent by groups or individuals protecting their turf or their piece of the action? How often isn't it that the main occupation of church members is putting the blame on someone else or spending a great deal of time talking about what is wrong. Finger-pointing is a very common occupation. You hear it all the time: "That's the church's problem." "That's the school's problem." "That the elder's job." "That's the pastor's job." "If the inactive members were more supportive of the church we wouldn't have financial problems." We all fall in the trap so easily. We spend a great deal of our time talking about how we would do things better but very little of our time doing it. Talk is cheap. Service takes effort. What causes such things? It is pride pure and simple--destructive selfish pride. So it is very fitting that James in the epistle quotes from Proverbs: "GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." (James 4:6) And if pride is so destructive and so pervasive what is the answer. The answer is to humbly get on our knees and in repentance hear the word of our Savior for he would show us the way.

### III. In Humble Service

For that is what Jesus did with His disciples in our text. He called them together and taught them: IF ANYONE WOULD BE FIRST, HE MUST BE LAST OF ALL AND SERVANT OF ALL. Be a servant. Don't be so interested in being first as in being a servant. To make this point even more clear Jesus uses an object lesson with the disciples. AND HE TOOK A CHILD AND PUT HIM IN THE MIDST OF THEM, AND TAKING HIM IN HIS ARMS, HE SAID TO THEM, "WHOEVER RECEIVES ONE SUCH CHILD IN MY NAME RECEIVES ME, AND WHOEVER RECEIVES ME, RECEIVES NOT ME BUT HIM WHO SENT ME." (V.36-37) Jesus here gets down to the root level--he uses as simple an illustration as he can. Welcome a little child in His name. For even as children are precious in the eyes of Jesus so is every soul. There is no better example than the humility of a child. Let them know and believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. And in this task we will be blessed for it is truly the task of service. St. Paul often begins his letters by referring to himself as a "servant" or "slave" of Jesus Christ. And in so doing he reminds us all that there is no place for boasting in the Christian Church. For if we boast we should do it only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. And how many opportunities for service do we have? How many ways are there in which we can show that love of Christ for us? There are many, many volunteers who offer their services to the church in so many ways. There are also numerous opportunities for service to missions and other helping organizations in the church. It is done with offerings and work and service--Time and talents and treasures. All of these things take commitment and prayer and encouragement. All of them are good examples of service. For there is always much that can be done--that needs to be done. But above all let us not forget the child--welcome the child in Jesus' Name. For whether someone is nine days, nine months, nine years, or ninety years old they need to be welcomed in His name. They need to hear the word of grace and love. They need to know that in the Name of Jesus there is salvation, peace and life everlasting. For the greatest service, and at the same time the most humble service, is to spread the word--the word of grace--the word about the crucified and risen Lord who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Drawn to the Cross, which Thou has blest  
With healing gifts for souls distressed,  
To find in Thee my life, my rest,  
Christ crucified, I come.

And then for work to do for Thee,  
Which shall so sweet a service be  
That angels well might envy me,  
Christ crucified, I come.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.