

Sermon Matthew 18 1 20 12th S af Pent

Sermon: 12th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 18:1-20 (18:1-14)

Theme: The children in Jesus' eyes

Goal: To look to the children as Jesus sees them

Dear Friends,

Introduction: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Who is the boss? This is the disciples’ concern in this text. They were debating among themselves several times to see who the greatest was: John and James asked to sit one at the right and another at the left hand of Jesus in His kingdom (Mark 1:35-45); even on the night when Jesus was betrayed, after the institution of the Lord's Supper, they were quarreling to see “which of them was considered to be greatest” (Luke 22:24).

The Epistle for today, Romans 13:1-10, talks about authority and that they were established by God. It is our duty to obey them. There we have the President (or Kings and Queens in other countries). But this is not the case in the Kingdom of Heaven, as the disciples were asking Jesus about “who is the greatest”.

The answer of Jesus in Mark 10:42-45 was: “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The answer of Jesus in our text was illustrated by a little child. Let's talk about the children through Jesus' eyes: How does He see them; what do we need to learn from them; and how shall we handle them.

I – To become like a little child

We don't know who that little child was that Jesus called and had him stand among them. Maybe it was one of Peter's kids... Jesus was in Cafarnaum, and while there, He used to stay at Peter's home...

The first argument of Jesus is similar to that of He had told to Nicodemus: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Children rely on their fathers and mothers without doubt. They jump into their arms, they eat what they offer, they feel secure when they are with their parents. When they hear about Jesus, they trust, they are happy. When they present questions about Jesus, they want to know a little bit more about Him. Therefore Jesus praised the faith of the children.

In spite of some fight among the children to see “who the boss is”, it usually happens among bigger children who copied the attitudes of the adults; not with little ones, as Jesus called a little one to set as an example.

To “become like little children” is the same as “to be born again” (John 3). It supposes a change of mind (repentance), humbleness and reliance (faith). There is no “greatest” in the Kingdom of Heaven. We are all servants, redeemed by God's grace in Jesus. Jesus is the Lord!

Jesus talks more about the children, to give a wider view of the children in His kingdom:

II – To welcome a little child in Jesus' name

“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.” - We have our children, or grandchildren, or adopted children, or godchildren. Do we welcome them “in the name of Jesus”? It seems to be something natural in our lives to have children. But Jesus gives a broader sense about this in this text. We need to be aware that the children are God's gifts, and that God “lends” them to us. We need to welcome them “in the name of Jesus”, this means: as we are welcoming Jesus Himself! We cannot do with them what we want or think that is good; but we need to take care of them according to God's will: To bring them to the Holy Baptism, to pray with them at home, to tell them Bible Stories about Jesus, to bring them to the church and to the Sunday School. You know that they cannot come by themselves; they need to be brought by their parents and grandparents. When you do this, be sure that this pleases God.

III – To cause a little one to sin

The opposite is true as well: If we don't do this to our children, we call God's wrath upon us. Jesus said: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!”

In Mark 10:13-16 we read: “People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, **and do not hinder them**, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.”

IV – Their angels in heaven

To show another perspective of the importance of the children in God's kingdom, Jesus opens a little window to look inside the heaven and He says: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” Jesus doesn't say this about the adults; but He affirms it about the children. And Jesus links His love to the children with the Parable of the Lost Sheep; and He says: “In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.”

Conclusion: Maybe some of you are thinking: I don't have little children at home anymore... this sermon was not for me... But, look: When Jesus says that we have to “change and become like little children” all these promises are for us as well as we believe trustfully like the children and when we humble ourselves like the children. Jesus loves children and adults, and His promises of forgiveness and life in His kingdom are for all.

Illustration: There is a real story that helps us to understand better the teaching of Jesus about children: A few years ago in the Para Olympic Games in Seattle, USA, nine (9) children with Down Syndrome were running a race. One of them stumbled and fell, and began to cry bitterly. When the others saw this, they stopped running and returned; one of the girls kissed him and said: “It's fine now, let's run together.” Then they all held the hand of their fellow runner and they all ran together until they hand in hand reached the tape.

We don't have many children in our congregation. The parents and grandparents are bringing them faithfully to the church. But I'm sure there are more children around in our families, or maybe in our neighborhood, or friends to our children. - We are talking bout outreach in the Elders Meeting, how to do it the best way. The suggested Watchword for the next year is Mark 5:19, when Jesus said: “Go home to your family and tell them what the Lord has done for

you!” - Let's put a goal in our life to bring other children to Jesus as well. And don't leave the children at home on Sunday morning. To bring them to the church is not just an option; it is a privilege! Jesus loves them and will bless them! Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle -Cape Town, 04 September 2011