

18th Sunday after Pentecost
ELW Service of the Word
Sunday, September 22, 2024

Introduction to the day

Today we hear James warn against selfish ambition, while the disciples quarrel over which one of them is the greatest. Jesus tells them the way to be great is to serve. Then, to make it concrete, he puts in front of them a flesh-and-blood child. We are called to welcome the children God puts in front of us, to make room for them in daily interaction, and to give them a place of honor in the assembly.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

O God, our teacher and guide, you draw us to yourself and welcome us as beloved children. Help us to lay aside all envy and selfish ambition, that we may walk in your ways of wisdom and understanding as servants of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

FIRST READING: Proverbs 31:10-31

A reading from Proverbs.

This passage, which ends the book of Proverbs, describes the good wife. She is a supremely capable and hardworking person, who runs the household and also engages in commercial ventures. She cares both for her family and for the poor, and she fears the LORD.

PSALM: Psalm 1

They are like trees planted by streams of water. (*Ps. 1:3*)

SECOND READING: James 3:13—4:3, 7-8a

A reading from James.

The wisdom God gives unites our hearts and minds. Instead of living to satisfy our own wants and desires, we manifest this wisdom in peace, gentleness, mercy, and impartiality toward others.

GOSPEL: Mark 9:30-37

Jesus' teaching and action in this text are directed to the church whenever it is seduced by the world's definition of greatness: prestige, power, influence, and money. The antidote to such a concern for greatness is servanthood.

GOSPEL MESSAGE - Last-place Finish

Top-ten lists, sports rankings, grade point averages: it is human nature to want to measure ourselves against others. People love competition. At its best, it can motivate us to reach new heights. However, it can also bring out our worst instincts.

Jesus understood this when he caught his disciples debating their own standing. By placing a child in their midst, he overturned their expectations. In Jesus' time, children were very low in the social order. His act was meant as a shocking reminder that in the kingdom of God, to be the greatest means to take last place behind the forgotten, the outcast, and people the world rejects.

Who are such people in our world today? How might we reach out to them and invite them into the center of our own circle? This can sometimes be difficult or unpleasant because it means putting

ourselves in the background and forces us to confront difficult truths about our world and our own hearts.

Of course, in the grand scheme of things, none of us is worthy to be in the middle of the circle. We are all flawed and broken. But Jesus welcomes us anyway. He takes all of us into his arms and declares us worthy. We do not need to measure up to receive God's love. Because of this, we are set free to love and serve others, especially the marginalized and the vulnerable, humbly putting others first and seeking to meet their needs.

Whenever we gather for worship, it is a sign that God's love is not a competition. We are all bathed in the waters of baptism. We all gather in a place of honor to be fed at God's table. Returning again and again to God's promises, we find our place at the center, with and among all God's beloved children.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Drawn together in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray with confidence for the church, God's good creation, and all who are in need.

Loving God, you welcome all at your table of grace. Instill in your church a spirit of humility and curiosity, that we embrace all who seek you. We pray especially for ministries of hospitality and faith formation, especially the Ladies Aid. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, you shape the world so there is more than enough for all. Curb our habits of overuse, and guide us toward more sustainable sources of energy, food, and water. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Gracious God, your peace brings justice and solidarity. Encourage peace among peoples, tribes, and nations; heal divisions in our country and local communities, that together we might cooperate for the good of all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Faithful God, you draw near to you all who are in need. Bring healing and wholeness to all who suffer (*especially* Linda Boland, Ken Fulford, Sandra Gagnon, Shirley Glickman, Walter Hobden, Donna L. Hoffman, Bill Lorbetskie, Glenda Panke, Marilyn Schneider, Danny Schultz, Doug Sell, Debbie Thom, Keith Weckwerth, Denita Wolfgram, Elaine Yourth, Harold Yourth, Stephanie Yourth, and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. Transform economic, political, and social systems that oppress vulnerable people, especially systems of structural racism and generational poverty. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Transforming God, you accompany all through changes and transitions. Help us to see where you are calling this community to new ways of living the gospel promise; assure us that even as change brings loss, it also brings hope and life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Merciful God, you embrace us on our final pilgrimage from this life. Accompany all who have died, console those who mourn, and at the last, show us the way to eternal life in you. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We entrust these and all our prayers to you, holy God, in the name of your beloved child, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

BLESSING (ELW p. 221)

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace.

Amen.

DISMISSAL (ELW p. 222)

Go in peace. Share the good news.

Thanks be to God.

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