

Sermon, Proper21B, September 26, 2021

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Scriptures @ https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp21_RCL.html

The Gospel (Last Week & This Week)

*Jesus sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, '**Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.**'...*

*... 'If any of you put a stumbling-block before **one of these little ones** who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. (Mark 9: 36-37, 42)*

Who are “**These Little Ones**” that Jesus is calling his disciples (the little ones Jesus is calling US) to Welcome, Support, and Protect?

Literally:

- Children

Safe Church Training:

Vulnerable People

- Elders
- Physical or Mental Disabilities (Temporary or Ongoing)
- Physical or Mental Illness (Temporary or Ongoing)
- Grief or Loss: Death of a loved one, Divorce, Job Loss
- Victims/Survivors (& Perpetrators) of Abuse
- [Historical Marginalization: BIPOC, LGBTQ+]

ABQ Faith Works:

- Economic Insecurity (Housing, Food, Money)
- Immigration Status
- Language

Bible:

- Little Ones=Young in age AND/OR Young in Faith”. People whose faith is new or vulnerable... seekers, visitors, new members (as well as people in phases of doubt, questioning, transition, or growth in faith)

(Re-read Scripture)

HOW is Jesus calling us to welcome, support and protect “these little one”?

Today's Hebrew Scripture (Numbers)

- **TOGETHER, as a COMMUNITY, not alone**

- *Moses says: "I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me.", God answers: "'Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you."*
- Example: Today's Safe Church Training

Today's Epistle (James)

- **With Honesty & Vulnerability; Humility & Prayer:** *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.*
- **With Habits of Community Support & Accountability:**
 - *Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them....* (We don't keep our suffering, sickness, or vulnerability a secret. We reach out to the community for prayer and support and *the community* steps up to provide what we need!
Example: Prayers (David); Meals (Mel), other???)
 - *If anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.* (This language is intense, and will probably rub most of us the wrong way. We Episcopalians tend to "mind your own business" Christians, and we are acutely aware of how scriptural admonitions like this have been used in abusive and destructive ways. The trick is to remember that almost every scriptural admonition aims to protect the vulnerable and keep the POWERFUL in check---although with this, as with many things, the Christian community has historically inverted the intention.

What is the "truth" that our community practices of support & accountability call us each back to?

The "truth" is not some sort of doctrinal purity. The truth is that God is love. The truth is that ALL are welcome at God's table. The truth is that whoever would be the greatest in God's Kingdom must be least of all and servant of all.

The truth is that this community--and any community whose members strive to live as disciples of Jesus-- exists to welcome, support, and protect the vulnerable, and to remove every "stumbling block" that might stand in the way of those "little ones" and the fullness of life in God's love.

And the truth is that removing stumbling blocks often requires sacrifice.

Let's go back to our list of "the little ones" Jesus is calling his disciples---"the little ones" Jesus is calling US-- to welcome, support and protect.

“These Little Ones”

- Children
- Elders
- Physical or Mental Disabilities (Temporary or Ongoing)
- Physical or Mental Illness (Temporary or Ongoing)
- Grief or Loss: Death of a loved one, Divorce, Job Loss
- Victims/Survivors (& Perpetrators!) of Abuse
- Historical Marginalization: BIPOC, LGBTQ+
- Economic Insecurity (Housing, Food, Money)
- Immigration Status
- Language
- People w/new or vulnerable faith...visitors, new members, “seekers”

What might be some of the stumbling blocks that might impede the full access of any of these “little ones” to the fullness of God’s love and life in Christ, here in THIS community?

- **How does our Social Life create Stumbling Blocks:**
 - Assumptions, Expectations & Norms?
 - Time, Money, Dress, Family Structure, Gender, Behavior & Belonging
- **How does our Liturgical Life create Stumbling Blocks:**
 - Music, Liturgical Art & Language, Beloved Traditions
- **How might our Institutional Life create Stumbling Blocks:** Community Policies, Procedures, and Practices?
 - Building & Architecture; Leadership Structures, Communication Style

The truth is that as a community of disciples Jesus calls us to make SACRIFICES for the good of the whole body, the whole community.

Love demands we make a variety of Sacrifices for the Good of the Whole: Time & Money; Independence & Autonomy; Comfort and Quiet

HOWEVER: Despite the vividly gruesome imagery of today’s Gospel passage, Jesus does NOT actually want us to sacrifice PARTS of the Body (Our own physical bodies OR the communal Body of Christ) And Jesus CERTAINLY does not want us to sacrifice PEOPLE...no member of the body is dispensable...the body requires EVERY member to be whole and healthy.

Jesus does not call us to sacrifice Parts or People
However, Jesus may--and often does-- call us to sacrifice POWER, PRIVILEGE, and PERSPECTIVE

Hand-Power (hold, accumulate, manipulate)
Feet-Privilege (mobility, access, advancement)
Eyes-Perspective, Preference, Point of View

Hear again the words from Mark's Gospel.

Hear again Jesus speaking to us, here, today:

*Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, **'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'**...*

*... 'If any of you put a stumbling-block before **one of these little ones** who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.*

What stumbling blocks are standing between the "little ones" God loves and the fullness of God's life and love here at St. Mark's?

And what stumbling blocks are standing between US--as individuals and as a community--and the fullness of God's life and love in Christ?

In what ways might our own (personal and communal) power (hand), privilege (foot), perspectives, preferences, and points of view (eyes) be creating or upholding those stumbling blocks? And what would it take for us to let those things go...so that we ALL might heed the gracious call of Jesus to step into the fullness of God's life and love, to live into the fullness of God's Kingdom *together*?