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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
10/18/2009, in Pentecost 20B  
Mark 10:32-45  
A New Notion of Glory

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

<sup>42</sup>so Jesus called them [his disciples] to him and said to them, “You know that among the gentiles those they call their rulers / lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. <sup>43</sup>Among you this is not to happen.

This morning’s Gospel Lesson is nearing the end of a time of holy teaching. Jesus has withdrawn from the crowds and focused on the Twelve. The period of teaching began in the previous chapter, right after the stories of the Mount of Transfiguration and the healing of the demon-possessed boy. St. Mark introduces this time of instruction with these words:

<sup>30</sup>They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have any one know it; <sup>31</sup>for *he was teaching his disciples*, saying to them, “The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” (Mark 9:30-31, RSV)

How I would have loved to have been part of the apostolic band, to have been in the very classroom of our Savior! The problem is that I fear I would not have learned my lessons any better than the Twelve did. In many ways, I am a good student. Always have been. But the lessons taught by our Lord are very hard to take in. It is not that they are hard for the intellect, but rather, they are hard for the heart to accept. The ways of Jesus challenge our souls.

Notice how St. Mark describes the teaching of Jesus. Jesus teaches his disciples by speaking of *himself*, their Master:

<sup>31</sup>for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him...” (Mark 10:31, RSV)

And this makes sense to me. It is the way of the apprentice and the master. The apprentice blacksmith, for example, learns to make good horseshoes by watching the ways of the master blacksmith. Likewise, here the Lord of the Church teaches the Apostles of the Church the ways of leadership by asking them to watch him, to imitate him, to listen to him, and to follow him.

If we ponder the teaching of Jesus over these past few Sundays, I believe we arrive at this principle: the true measure of a man, of a woman, and of a society is how you treat the children in your midst. Jesus teaches us to cherish the children.

St. Mark's Gospel is a stern Gospel. It does not contain the Christmas story: there is no mention of the shepherds abiding in the field by night, nor of the angelic song, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth." There is no Sermon on the Mount, and therefore no lovely saying about the lilies of the field and how they grow, neither toiling nor spinning. Mark does not tell the parables of the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan. In fact, there is not even a resurrection narrative. But there are three passion predictions, along with our Lord's strong exhortations to this disciples to take up their cross and follow him:

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his **cross** and follow me." (Mark 8:34, RSV)

St. Mark's Gospel is a stern Gospel, I say, but not when it comes to children. He is very careful when it comes to children to preserve the teachings of Jesus concerning the little ones in our midst. Consider some of his teaching during the last chapter or so of St. Mark. Recall the teaching of Jesus when he overheard his disciples disputing about who is the greatest. Notice how he leads the Twelve to think of the children:

<sup>34</sup>But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup>He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." <sup>36</sup>Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:34-37, RSV)

And how could the disciples forget the saying of Jesus about the millstone? The Twelve have been walking with him. He has withdrawn from public teaching and is focusing on them. How could they forget his eyes turned toward them and his warning concerning the children?

<sup>42</sup>And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. (Mark 9:42, KJV)

And what of the Twelve's part in the world's instinct that children are "better seen than heard"? Surely, the disciples cannot forget their Lord's tender embrace of the children:

<sup>13</sup>And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>15</sup>Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” <sup>16</sup>And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them. (Mark 10:13, RSV)

In this fallen world, everyone is tempted to take it out on the one beneath that one. But who bears the burden down the line? The children do. So, one commentator on our text imagines the CEO of a big company receiving bad news for the firm. Let’s imagine it to be one of our city’s big banks or investment houses. So, the chief executive officer summons the chief financial officer and blasts him or her for the report. That officer answers back as best he or she can, then summons his own staff and tears into them. So it continues on down to the lowliest workers. And all along the lines of power, if the bosses and workers do not have some measure of grace, they will storm on home and take out their frustration and anger on the family all the way down to the children, who are little and have little ability to take things out on any one else.

This is the way of the world -- too much the way of the world: those with authority use their strength to promote their own interests, often at the expense of those who are below them. But Jesus teaches that it is not to be so among the Twelve. They might be the veritable “princes of the church.” Yet they must remember the weak and the frail:

<sup>42</sup>so Jesus called them [his disciples] to him and said to them, “You know that among the gentiles those they call their rulers / lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. <sup>43</sup>Among you this is not to happen.

Back in 1970, the English songwriter Cat Stevens composed a lovely album called *Tea for the Tillerman*. The first song on that album was called “Where Do the Children Play?” This song comes to my mind because it seems so much in the spirit of the teachings of Jesus over the past few Sundays.

Well you roll on roads over fresh green grass.  
For your lorry loads pumping petrol gas.  
And you make them long, and you make them tough.  
But they just go on and on, and it seems that you can’t get off.

Oh, I know we’ve come a long way,  
We’re changing day to day,  
But tell me, where do the children play?  
(from *Tea for the Tillerman*, 1970)

Remember the children. Remember those who are weak compared to you.

So, that is what we get if we imagine ourselves to be among the Twelve pondering the teaching of Jesus. We hear that we should cherish the children. Now, let us behold Jesus as he continues his steady walk toward Jerusalem. We will see a man who is willing to pay the price that the children might have a chance in this world.

Three times, St. Mark tells us, Jesus predicts his coming passion and death. It is starting to make an impression on the Twelve. They are becoming apprehensive. And they are right to be so. In the flow of St. Mark's Gospel, the semester is just about done, the time of holy teaching is just about complete. The path they have been walking toward Jerusalem is just about to land them there. And in landing them there, they are soon to watch the death of their Master:

<sup>33</sup>“Now we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the gentiles, <sup>34</sup>who will mock him and spit at him and scourge him and put him to death; and after three days he will rise again.” (Mark 10:33-34, NJB)

You might heard the saying about your life and your witness, about how “your life is the only Bible some people are ever going to have a chance to read.” Well, in watching Jesus, we are seeing a true human being. His life corresponds to his teaching. He walks the walk, as they say.

One way to describe the mission of Jesus was that he came to save the children. He did not come to lord it over the children, but to save them. He came to fix things in this world so that the little ones would have a chance, when apart him, they would have little chance. Picture mighty Pilate lording it over Jesus, condemning him to crucifixion and washing his hands of the matter. Well, compared to Jesus, even mighty Pilate is simply a babe in this world. Jesus could have flicked him away with a mere poke of his finger. Pilate is weaker by ten thousand, thousand times. He is less intelligent, less noble, less innocent, and less good. But Jesus did not come to defeat Pilate. He came to defeat much mightier opponents -- even sin, death, and the devil. Jesus came to do battle with the great enemies of humanity, for all we are like sheep who have gone astray, all we are like children with little chance of standing up the forces of this world that would break us down.

So, that is what Jesus means to do: he means to contend with sin, death, and the devil, that the little ones of his universe might have a chance. Do these “little ones” include you and me? Yes, indeed! As surely as you hear the words in this Blessed Sacrament we are soon to celebrate and feel the press of our Lord's body and blood upon your tongue, take it to heart, that Jesus counts you among the little ones on earth he came to save.

The chief thing about today's Gospel reading is that Jesus invites his disciples to be *that kind* of person on earth. We can borrow words from the great Maundy Thursday story to apply the example of Jesus to ourselves:

<sup>13</sup>You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. <sup>14</sup>If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. <sup>17</sup>If you know these things, blessed are you if you *do* them. (John 13:13-17, RSV)

And so it is that Jesus teaches a new notion of "glory." James and John had thundered that they wanted seats of glory in Christ's kingdom. Jesus answers by speaking of a new kind of glory and a new kind of leadership on earth. According to the ways of Jesus, the true measure of a man, of a woman, of a society consists in paying the price that the little ones among us might have a chance in this world. And so it that Jesus teaches a new bottom line: let us so conduct ourselves that in our calculations of profit, we include the poor and the weak. Jesus, I say, would have a new kind of economists afoot on earth. He would have each of be mothers and fathers to this world.

This is the policy by which we ourselves will be saved, through the grace and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.