**Mark 9:30-37 September 19, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Mark chapter 9 here re-reading these words. “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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What does a child want? If you could answer this question in a generalized way that it applies to all children you would no doubt be a billionaire. The wants of children are important in the eyes of business and our economy, companies are trying to innovate and figure out what children are going to want in order to sell to them, and the most miraculous part in all this is that a child has no job and therefore makes no money. They are incapable of buying the things that they want, and yet their wants are still very important, especially in the season that’s coming up in just a few short months, when children will be looking under the Christmas tree. But therein lies the difficulty. How can you predict what children want next year, for next year’s Christmas, today? It doesn’t seem possible. But, why should it matter? Children aren’t rich, children’s expectations should be low since they can’t earn anything for themselves in terms of wealth which is needed to purchase the things that they want, and yet their wants remain high, because of parents and grandparents that want to make them happy. Which leads to gadgets, and electronics, and movies, and toys, and trips, and a host of many other things that can produce in a child happiness, but the truth is, the stuff, can’t last, and they will need new and better and different very soon. Which is where the companies innovate and advertise and the child finds their new wants. Which is what makes them wants and not needs, because what a child needs, is exactly what Jesus speaks about in our Gospel lesson today, and it’s what we all strive for and need in our lives as God’s own children. Jesus takes a child, puts him in the midst of them, and takes him in his arms. There is the biblical definition of what a child needs, but to sum it up from a secular viewpoint, it was Fred Rodgers, the beloved host of Mr. Rodgers Neighborhood, a children’s show beloved for many years who said very specifically to this point of what a child needs, “Love is the root of everything. All learning, all parenting, all relationships. Love or the lack of it.” What does a child want? Anything and everything, it changes every day it changes based on a commercial or some other advertisement or what they see around them. What does a child need? Love.

Or if you could sum it up in one word and theme of Mark chapter 9 it would be, reception. And if the first thing you think of in the word reception is a wide receiver catching a football, you aren’t wrong in your description. Reception of a child is the warmth that comes from hugging and picking a child up in your arms when they run to you in excitement. Reception is to hug a child close to yourself and in that moment they know they are protected and loved. This is at the heart of what Jesus is talking about when he says, “whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” What does a child want? To be received, to be loved, to be cared for by someone else, because a child, as we talked about, is vulnerable, is in need of protection and can’t provide for their own wants or needs by themselves. They are truly what Jesus describes saying earlier, “the last of all.” And it’s not an insult to children, it’s a fact of life. I don’t know what age comes to your mind when I keep using the word child, but we aren’t talking about a teenager or grown child who can drive and work after school at the McDonalds. I’m talking about a child who is in need of supervision, and who needs help in doing almost everything in their daily life. Because in our faith, when we look at our salvation, we are God’s child, and our faith sees that as the blessing it is, and our sinful self sees it as a limitation.

Needing supervision is a limitation. Needing help is a limitation. If you are in need it means that you aren’t as capable as others and therefore you are less than in the eyes of the world around you. This is how the disciples did not want to be. I see no clearer vision in the Law of the Word of God this week than what happens in this particular section of Mark, and how this is a scene that plays out very often in our lives today. We are truly a self-centered people. We care about us first and foremost because in many ways we see the world revolving around our things, and our stuff, and our people. Jesus gives a solid passion prediction, as clear as you can find in the Gospels, He states very clearly, “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.” The disciples hear the plight of their beloved teacher, this man who leads them and has provided for them, and they don’t understand, so they don’t say anything. Imagine if someone came up to you and confided in you, told you about something very serious that was going on in their life; a cancer diagnosis, the loss of a loved one, a serious addiction that was threatening their life, and you didn’t say anything! What is that?! How can you say nothing? No words of encouragement? No words of comfort or help at all? Nothing?! And from there they continue to travel, and they all are talking to each other on the way, but they aren’t talking about what Jesus will face or how they can help him, instead they are arguing with each other about who among them is the greatest. Jesus tells them about what’s going to happen to Him and all they talk about is the greatness is themselves. It’s a perfect picture of our world today where all we seem to care about is what’s going on in our circles, and our building, and our lives, and when we hear about the plight of others we quickly turn the focus back to me, me, me.

Which shows our opinion of ourselves, and the exaltation of ourselves in terms of what’s important in our hearts and minds. That we are the elevated ones, that we are the important ones and we don’t have time to care about what other people are going through. But it also shows a childish immaturity, the negative side of a childlike approach to faith and being God’s child. Jesus says, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” A child, in the grand scheme of life, in the eyes of society around it, is last. Is weak, limited, vulnerable, and in need of help. And we are called to be humbled as God’s children. Our Epistle lesson cuts right to the heart of this selfish attitude and self-boasting saying “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice……. “ A child can’t boast in their accomplishments, they haven’t accomplished anything, they are lucky to be alive because someone takes care of them. We are called to be humbled by God and seen not as a champion and hero, not as the one who is the Savior but instead we are called to be servants of all, the lowest and lowliest. Because in our humility God sees our state and exalts us, James says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.”

What does a child want? Reception, and exaltation. Not to be exalted in the sense of constant praise and compliments, although I’m sure they wouldn’t mind you heaping praise upon them for learning to walk and talk and do many different things, and I’m not saying you shouldn’t give positive reinforcement to a child, this message isn’t a parenting seminar, but to close our message this morning I want you to think about this particular verse from our Introit, and think about it from the perspective of a child. “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Again, what does a child want? Or to use the language of our Introit, what are the desires of the heart of a child? It’s not a promotion. It’s not a bigger boat or bigger house. It’s not fame and recognition as the greatest kid who ever ate green beans or learned to walk the fastest. A child’s desires isn’t even that caught up in their own stuff, they are generally content if their basic needs are met. But when a child hears the voice of their Father or their Mother, after not seeing them for a while or after they’ve been gone, what does that child want more than anything? Reception and exaltation. A child crawls and runs to the one they love who receives them, hugs them close and lifts them up into their arms to show them that they love them and they are there for them. For the child it is the desire of their hearts realized in a reception and an exaltation of their body, but also a teaching moment in their minds of the truth that they are loved. You have been received in the same way, through Your Baptism, through the faith created in your hearts, you are God’s child, and it’s a good thing. It’s not limiting, it’s not a detriment that you rely upon God for your salvation, because you aren’t the greatest, the smartest, the best, and you never will be, and that’s alright. Your salvation is found in the work of Jesus, who does it all for you, who was handed over to evil men who killed him and who rose again on the 3rd day just as he said. You have been received by God the Father through God the Son, not on account of what you’ve done but as a child is received in the love of their family for their identity as being their very own. You did not choose Him, but He choose you, and loves you, and receives you, and exalts you to be His witness here in this world as his very own child.

So in your life, as a child of God, what do you want? I’m sure a very large number of things catered to your tastes in terms of hymns, how the service looks and how the church is run, but ultimately, what do you need? Reception. Exaltation. And love. You are loved by God, and you can see it all around you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.