

Pentecost B-16

Sept. 24, 2006

Mark 9: 30-37

Title: Welcoming Jesus

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

Peli the pelican took a real beating at VBS in August. Every day Peli had in his mouth a clue where a cross could be found in this sanctuary. A child would be chosen to come up and reach into Peli's big mouth and pull out a clue. The children were so eager to do this....to be the one Reaching inside a puppet's mouth.

But Peli made it difficult to reach inside.
First you had to wake him up,
Then you weren't sure if he'd bite
You or not. The first few times
You reached into his mouth, he might snap or grab...
Eventually, he'd open up and you could grab the clue

Peli took a beating....When Bible School ended the children wanted to reach In and be grabbed by Peli. But there was one little boy all week who you could tell was frightened by Peli. Each day he would grow a little closer. Finally, on Friday, he was willing to, real timidly, get close.

Should Peli have tried to swallow this boy's head, it's
Likely he would have had pelican nightmares or maybe
Developed a life long fear of birds...
No...it was Peli's responsibility to sit there and
Let that frightened child have his way...reassure the
Child that Peli was not going to do anything frightening.

Jesus announces his death and resurrection.
The 12 are dumbfounded and afraid.
Jesus catches them arguing about greatness, sits them down and offers
Those kingdom breaking, life reordering words:
**WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE LAST OF ALL AND
SERVANT OF ALL**
He then brings the child as example of whom to welcome.

It's tempting to see in this action Jesus' love of children's innocence or beauty or spontaneity. That's not his emphasis. NO, the child Has no status, the child is the least, the child can't pay you back!

Helpless!

Lauren Elizabeth Macemore
Alexander Clark Handest are baptized into Christ today!
They are marked with the cross of our Lord
And they are reminders of us to tend the least.

When our staff at our Tuesday meeting were studying this passage
Director of Music Ministry Carol Henderson noted with question why
Mark would have made sure we knew that Jesus sat down.

He sat down. That detail is almost like in a movie when the music gets
louder...something important is about to happen. They would have likely sat
in a circle. In that day when you were passing judgement on someone you
Would likely put them in the middle of the circle—rebuke them publically,
Shame them in front of friends,
Or worse yet –stone them.

Were one of the 12 about to be brought into the circle's center
To be admonished for greatness? It becomes a judgement
circle.No...a child was brought there. Someone with no
position or power in the center...no longer a judgement circle.

It's estimated that in the last decade that about 20% of American male
children were sexually abused. What a crime against the lowly, those
without power. And that 24% of American women have been subjected to
sexual abuse. What a crime against the powerless. I tired to confirm these
statistics. I was unable to, but I believe they are representative.

We are invited to notice this! To get into the middle of the judgement circle
and embrace the least. We don't know which child is just being timid, shy
before the puppet...and which one is afraid because of what's happening
elsewhere in their lives.

WHOEVER WELCOMES ONE SUCH CHILD IN MY NAME
WELCOMES ME, AND WHOEVER WELCOMES ME WELCOMES
NOT ME BUT THE ONE WHO SENT ME.

Say what? This seems backwards.
Welcoming the least---welcoming Jesus?

This won't get us interviewed
On CNN or Fox. This won't get us written up in the Friday
Faith Pages in the N & O. We won't appear in the
ELCA's website as congregations with best practices!

The capacity to welcome another, to create space in your heart
For another, especially whom the world counts as unimportant
Is true greatness?
Such programs as Stephen Ministry are so important because
They intentionally give skills to welcome those whose
Lives have been made least.

The disciples were silent when Jesus asks about their discussion.
What makes us silent before Jesus?
What makes me silent before Jesus, ready for his judgement is
That I don't argue about greatness, but I do talk about how busy I am---
Aka—how important I am.
I do like to tell stories of my challenging experiences---aka—how
resourceful I am.
I am prone to eagerly tell you all about myself—aka—I'm worth listening
to.

Is this where we are stuck? Can we be empowered to
create space for another—your child, your spouse,
Your coworker in need, the new classmate in town who
Knows no one, the wait staff, the grocery bagger,
The Coffee House participant, the one whose skin
Doesn't resemble yours....is welcoming Jesus?

What if greatness were understood in Jesus' terms?

“Apart from the cross of Jesus it is impossible to understand
how becoming least of all and servant of all constitutes
greatness.” I read that in a commentary. It hit me between
the eyes.

Under the shadow of the Cross we are being formed,
empowered for kingdom greatness. This is Jesus'

Word lived in us. We too become great by becoming
little. Let's be the least church in Raleigh!...Giving
God the glory under the shadow of the cross

Lauren, Alexander, you and me are

Moved toward true living.

Can you remember what it was like learning to write? Above the blackboard at school were all the letters of the alphabet---capitals and lower case. And on large lined paper you would have to copy those letters.

Often when you looked at your writing and compared it to the example, it didn't compare. You were a long way from making it. The difference was significant.

We may never fully write these words in our life:

WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE LAST OF ALL
AND SERVANT OF ALL

But we are still privileged to bear the name and life of Jesus
In this community. And as we open ourselves to those
Least, who are among us and around us, we, we welcome
Jesus and the one who sent Him.

Praise God! Amen!!