

Sunday, September 23, 2018

Proverbs 31:10-31

James 3:13 to 4:3, 7-8

Mark 9:30-37

Welcoming all for Jesus

In a recent movie a young boy wanting to impress the girl whose father had tailor made clothing promised himself that one day she would be his and that he would provide for her the best in life, more than her father ever could. The boy worked hard and when the company closed he used their faulty collateral to buy a museum. This was not a prosperous adventure until he added living exhibits of people who were considered different based upon human qualities and abilities. He gave them dignity as they sought to fit in to what society said was acceptable at this time. By this, he also enabled a family to develop amongst all the performers. But he did not stop there as he wanted more- to support the famous and to prove to the theatre world that he was worth the name, the Greatest Showman. P.T. Barnum's fame did grow but at the cost of what was most important to him- his family and his performing troupe and even the museum building which housed them all. Yet his ingenuity led him to the next step as a showman, a master ringleader for the circus which bore his name. He was considered the greatest showman but at what cost? The performers were people, and the audience was often deceived by what they paid to see. Yet, he could put on a show which brought people of all ages together. Was he the greatest at what he did? Only time will tell.

Jesus and his disciples had been travelling the area and were passing through different communities in Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were because he was teaching his disciples what they needed to know. He tells them a second time that he, Jesus, the son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. He will be killed and after 3 days he will rise. As he spoke, the disciples did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him

They came to Capernaum and when they were in a house, Jesus asked them "What were you arguing about on the road? None of the disciples wanted to answer because they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down Jesus called the twelve disciples around them and said, "if anyone wants to be first, he must be very last and the servant of all." The look on their faces told Jesus he needed to explain this and to do so well. Jesus took a small boy and asked the boy to stand among the disciples. He then took that child in his arms and said to the disciples, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." They might have understood this, but we do not know to what depth.

A child was in Jesus' arms, and to welcome a child amongst a group of adults talking, seriously conversing was against social norms. Children were seen and not heard of course, but for Jesus to say that to welcome a child during an adult conversation and say that this child should be made to be comfortable was beyond their experience. Children were important for family and future opportunities but to place a child in the midst of a discussion regarding who was greater, threw everything out of what was normal. And when he said that if one welcomes children, they welcome him, Jesus as well as God, the Father/Creator.

We know that one of the most important roles in business today is how a person is greeted when entering a store, a doctor's office, a residence for seniors, hotels or even a church is in how you are greeted. Walmart is known for their greeters as they stand at the door, wear a distinctive vest whose color may change over the year. The greeter's primary task is to provide a sunny disposition to welcome customers. But they are also there as customers leave to say good-bye and to deter shoplifting as they cross-check customers' receipts when they leave. But it is in the welcoming that we come into the store and are relaxed looking for a cart and then going our way to find what we would like to buy. It is in the welcoming that we know that we are valued as a customer and getting a smile at the door helps us to focus on our ordinary tasks.

Glenwood United Church is a welcoming church—we are glad when people from all different backgrounds, experiences, ages come to worship and share of themselves. This is because Jesus calls us his faithful followers to open our hearts and hands to love others—all others. Whether you have great knowledge of God's Word and have a strong faith or if you are coming back to faith, or like a child—learning about Jesus and trying to understand who he is and can be, you are the reason we welcome you and ask you to work, walk and worship with us. For we too have been welcomed in the past by others and this is a church family who cares and shares together we journey together to understand life's difficulties, face problems and come to know Jesus as the Son of Man who died and rose again for our sakes.

When Jesus was teaching the disciples it seemed they just didn't get him or his purpose. He had asked them who the people thought he was. They answered saying he was the Christ or Messiah but they did not want him to die. They believed who he was but that as the Messiah he could change the way things were without dying. After all, he received people of all circumstances and knew what ailed people was not only what afflicted them physically, but that they needed to know God's Spirit. They needed to know the depth of God's love for them and this knowledge would come when he God's Son, would die for them. Jesus also knew that each person who believed in him as Christ needed to have

knowledge of him as a person who cared for them and loved them. And the only way that this knowledge would be shared, would be if he taught his disciples first and they passed on His way of love.

As Jesus followers we learn many lessons about life and death and the promise of eternal life. This is all possible because he died and rose again so that we might be forgiven and that we would receive the promise of eternal life if we believe. Sometimes we need to step back and consider what these lessons about life mean. That is, to think about how we greet each other, how we care about each other and how we show it. Often it is in the words of children that we learn and grow because what we believe may be shattered and uncertain. What we thought of as great has been brought down a few notches and what we understand as important teachings only leads us to more questions.

A Sunday School teacher asked the children in her class, "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into Heaven?" "NO!" the children all answered.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?" Again, the answer was, "NO!"

"Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my spouse, would that get me into Heaven?" I asked them again. The answer was "No!"

One little boy spoke loudly and asked the important question, "Don't you have to die first?"

All the teacher could do was laugh and say yes, but we need to know that Jesus will welcome us into his loving embrace if we believe. And to be like Jesus is to become so secure that his love is deep and real so much so that you can no longer relate to other people according to rank or power or money or prestige. Other people—whether custodians or government leaders are treated with equal dignity. Everyone is regarded as a VIP. Children seem to do this intuitively; adult Christians have to relearn it.

The question that we must ourselves—do we understand who Jesus is and that to follow him faithfully means to learn and continue to learn more about him. We read in verse 32: "But they did not understand." These words should be hung in the halls of the museum of humanity. When confronted by true greatness, we simply do not see it nor follow their example. But children full of wonder and trust will welcome others and show others what it means to trust, to love and to care like Jesus.

Let us pray. God of grace we praise you and we rejoice that you welcome us all into your family in faith and with hope. Show us who you are and can be in our lives. Help us to open our arms to receive those whom you love who have heard your voice and now come seeking your presence always. Bless us all we pray Amen.