

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (2017)

Matthew 18:1–20 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

In the Name of Jesus.

I love it when Jesus gets all threatening and woe-speaking!
He twists Himself up all serious and lets loose with talk of the fires
of hell, like He’s MOSES or something!

Your Jesus AIN’T no Moses! Praise the Lord!

In short: heaven and earth will not stand for Jesus to

DEMOTED to the status of Moses—not the Father above, nor the little ones beneath. And so, our SAVIOR, brushes away every temptation to DEMOTE you and me, any of the baptized; whom He calls the ‘little ones who believe in Me.’

Who are they? Lost sheep for the seeking!

The brother who sins against you—and who is now ELEVATED into YOUR hands, hearts, prayers, minds, soul—to restore with all the gentleness of the Different Spirit Who beams out from you since the day YOU were baptized; baptized, that is, confessed and admitted and ELEVATED to the Father above as one who CAN...ONLY...BE...GIVEN...TO!

As the liturgy teaches us to make each breath out AND IN a prayer to God to ‘have mercy’—on ALL MEN, but ESPECIALLY, ‘Lord, have mercy on US!’

In other words:

‘Don’t expect too much from this package to You, dear Father! How DARE I knock you off of your throne as The One Who is ALL...ABOUT...ME, despite who I am—knock you OFF with thinking that I—SOMEHOW—are ALL...ABOUT...YOU!’

Doctor Martin Luther taught the Church that—now and then—the Living God does an UN-NATURAL thing, a strange thing: He preaches the LAW! He condemns and kills and slays and goes on and on about hellfire and damnation, und so weiter....

But the PROPER work of the Unique Spirit of Mary's Boy is the Gospel, the Glad Tidings for all to rejoice, that GOD...IS...NOT...GOING...TO...TREAT...ANY...OF...US...AS...WE...DESERVE...ANY-MORE!

What prompted Jesus to turn so strange? The question of the disciples.----

‘Forgive this poor preacher, dear Lord, for repeating such blasphemies and tempting your little ones! But it is YOUR Word that records it!’

Pardon me, dear children of the Heavenly Father. It's a terrible thing for y'all to have to hear AGAIN; but I need to make this point! Lord, have mercy!

The disciples asked Him, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’

(And all we little ones DIE a little inside, each time that question rears its scary snout! Ugh!)

OK. It's natural; they were little ones too, the first disciples; perhaps ‘littlest’ of all!

Natural: for the ONLY THING we are WIRED FOR is to cast about and figure out WHERE God is, and HOW MUCH is

needed to get on His good side again; and then, MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, how do we size up ourselves over against one another, to see who grabs the eyes of heaven MOST and dazzles His eyes!

By the Holy Spirit poured out on me at my ordination as your pastor, I pledge, guarantee and confirm that THAT AIN'T GOD, not YOUR God—any babbling like I just babbled.

But the Old Man in us, the 'grewed-up' in us, the pretender, can ONLY be confused by the Gospel! The TV and newspaper, social media and the telephone are DEDICATED to raising up anyone who can benefit ME, and tearing DOWN anyone who does not appeal to me. GOD—if there IS a God—must play that game for keeps, right?!

So, the confusion of the disciples.

Unless you forgive your brother from the heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, pray for those who persecute you.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Among those born of women, none is greater than John. But he who is LEAST in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

So there's their confusion! 'SURELY,' the disciples thought 'we're just not getting the program Jesus is laying out; the program for advancement, for success, to stand out and become outstanding in the eyes of heaven! Let's make Jesus speak more plainly and ask Him directly, who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It will lay bear our ambition, but this is a serious matter!'

So serious, so EVERY-THING to the Lord, that He treated those disciples as the little children they were. Little ones love object lessons. So He put a child in the midst of them and taught them. (They were a remedial group, those first disciples. Thank God!)

'Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'

What did the child do to 'humble' himself? Not a thing. He simply heard the voice of Jesus and came to Him; and the Lord set the little one up as a city set on a hill, a light shining on a table in a dark room, a dark world. And He SAVED US, my dear ones. He almost didn't need to go to the cross after this! But He did, to put all the final seals and guarantees on God and Him and us and the Queer Spirit Who is only happy when He dwells in creatures like us!

For the little one can ONLY be taught. And then, next day—next hour? Next minute?!, has to be taught again!

How? With the thundering of God from Mount Sinai with the hard stone tablets of God's demands?

Nope. With a bit of water and ALL that heaven has to give: kind Father, devoted Savior, persistent Spirit.

Did you notice what we're supposed to do—the Church!—when someone acts naturally and sins, and won't listen, won't listen, won't listen? 'Treat him as a Gentile and a tax collector!'

Yeah—and how azackly is THAT?

'The tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to hear Jesus... .'

How do we treat those who will not listen, will not pay attention, will not change, will not put in as we have put in?

Treat them as little ones and lost sheep and those who CAN...ONLY...BE...GIVEN...TO!

Who has greater cause to thank God this day than you and I, my dear ones?!

For the WHOLE POINT—as far as your poor, ign'ant pastor is concerned—the whole point of us meeting here today is for the

Savior to SAVE us again. To give us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink: for WHO needs pardon and forgiveness, new life and salvation MORE than those who have heard and learned the Gospel, and yet have lived as we live, and treated those around us as we do.

Let me be strange for one minute.

The Lord does not say that a ten ton millstone tied to our neck and pushed into the ocean awaits you and me when we DEMAND by word, sneer and attitude that others perform BETTER for us before we love them. No, the Lord says, ‘You’re going to WISH for a millstone and a rope and the deep deep!’

Now, proper again:

In other words, even NOW, you and I can ONLY...BE...GIVEN...TO!

The Lord is NOT going to be Savior, Savior, Savior, until the last moment—and THEN turn around and demote Himself to MOSES: ‘Did you GET WITH MY PROGRAM, or DID YOU NOT?!’

And He will never, says the Spirit, demote you, me, the lost sheep, the little ones, the Gentiles or the tax collectors—He will never, says the Spirit, demote us from those who can ONLY...BE...SAVED in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!