

The Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost 2021
Mark 9

30[The disciples] went on from there and passed through Galilee. And [Jesus] did not want anyone to know, 31for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, **“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.”** 32But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

33And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” 36And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

In the Name of Jesus.

Rejoice in the greatness, my dear Lutherans, that is within arm's reach! You're getting your faith wrapped around greatness, your mind, your arms, when the devil corners you with one of his own, and you are interrogated this way: 'Do you Lutherans baptize babies and little children?'

It can be scary. But the Spirit of Jesus cries out to you, following the one with arms nailed wide open on the cross: even then, at the worst temptation of all...

Open your arms! In the Name of Jesus: make your face shine upon your poor questioner; be gracious to her; lift up your countenance upon him; give them peace. *Be* the great servant you were baptized to be!

The face that makes this interrogation is always a beat-up face; a frightened face; hence, the superiority of the raised eyebrows and smirking lip and squinting eye. It's the face of someone who has 'first' and 'last' all kerbobbled; 'great' and 'servant' too.

Plaintive, *desperate* words came to me through a contemporary song. Confession: I am much more sympathetic to the *near-prayer* scrambling evident in what religious people call 'secular' music, rather than so much of the boasting I hear from so-called 'Christian' music. 'Don't know about anyone else, buddy Jesus! But this guy's on your side!' I cannot.

But the babies; sounds like baby crying. Lyrics: 'Why can't you just forgive me? I don't want to relive all the mistakes I've made...along...the...way.....'

I so want to grab and handful of water and find that poor baby. But alas! He is beyond arm's reach. And, Lord have mercy, the song goes on.

'But you always find a way, to keep me right here waiting....'

Without enfolding arms of love, children can only learn the same tired game. 'Oh yeah! Well, you too!'

Politics explained. The editorial board at the local paper: explained.

Now these words are clear too:

30[The disciples] went on from there and passed through Galilee. And [Jesus] did not want anyone to know, 31for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, **“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him.”**

Jesus...had...to hide! Praise God our Heavenly Father! Never such a King! King...in *hiding*?

Jesus had to hide what was going on with Him outside the nice things He could do: like feeding many with nothing, raising the dead, et cetera.

So your poor pastor begs you again, dear Sheep of the Good Shepherd. Don't try to air-condition cool your fellow communicants on Sunday by the speed with which you blow past them after you pray with them! They are here for your love, for your arms, for your *reception*.

There's a world out there that cannot rejoice in the Gospel that holds fast your fellow redeemed. Jesus tells us today about the hotel in which we little ones are spending a few days and nights. It is run by the devil. And the owner of the hotel and all his staff have no interest in giving you rest and comfort. Instead, their goal is to rob and starve and harm and kill you. What did the great saints sing? 'You can check out any time you want; but you can never leave.'

Your poor pastor sees no end to his current foul mood. The Lord Jesus summoned some little ones from our arms to His. They are better now, by far. And yet: when God takes them from us He takes Himself away! 'Receive them, receive Jesus, receive all of God.' Yes. But what happens when they are beyond *our* reach?

Well, there are still a few be-hinds warming the pews today. Mouths that eat and drink impossible King, Unbelievable God. The Son of Man.

My dear ones: I too, with you, desire that everyone in town would give up their idolatry and praise the Lord instead: stuff and God cannot share a heart; it's one or t'other. And I desire, with you, that if and when people praise the Lord, they praise HIM, and not the volume, the earnestness of their praise! Keep praying. Keep confessing. Keep loving.

And hear your poor king, pastor Paul, who insists on ruling just these: your ears, your hope, your sins. There *are* men, women, children, within arm's reach. They are great to the Spirit of Jesus, fit homes for Him to dwell in. While they are still within arm's reach, your God is within arm's reach, now.

And now, you are fully resourced to face the devil and army in full array, the worst temptation of all:

'You people baptize the *last* people you'd go to for a Bible Study or direction in life? Tiny tots, who can tell you nothing of the weighty matters of life and death,

repentance and faith, reformation of life and a pursuit of good works that please Heaven? Really? Do Lutherans baptize, and treat as believing and safe and beyond improvement, babies?!'

Exclusively! In the Name of Jesus.