

Pentecost #17

9-19-2021

J.V. Trautwein, Pastor

Celebrate (Introduction)

“Today we hear James warn against selfish ambition, while the disciples quarrel over which one of them is the greatest. Jesus tells them the way to be great is to serve. Then, to make it concrete, he puts on front of them a flesh-and-blood child. We are called to welcome the children God puts in front of us, to make room for them in daily interaction, and to give them a place of honor in the assembly”

We come together in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Hymn: [“Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now”](#)

Psalm: Psalm 54

Save me, O God, by thy name,
and vindicate me by thy might.

²Hear my prayer, O God;
give ear to the words of my mouth.

³For insolent men[Ⓜ] have risen against me,
ruthless men seek my life;
they do not set God before them. *Selah*

⁴Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder[Ⓜ] of my life.

⁵He will requite my enemies with evil;
in thy faithfulness put an end to them.

⁶With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to thee;
I will give thanks to thy name, O Lord, for it is good.

⁷For thou hast delivered me from every trouble,
and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.”

Hymn of Praise: [“Oh, Worship the King”](#)

Prayer of the Day

“O God, our teacher and guide, you draw us to yourself and welcome us as beloved children. Help us to lay aside all envy and selfish ambition, that we may walk in your ways of wisdom and understanding as servants of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.”

1st Reading: [Jeremiah 11:18-20](#)

2nd Reading: [James 3:13-4:3, 7-8](#)

The Gospel: [Mark 9:30-37](#)

Hymn of the Day: [“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word”](#)

The Message: ([Video Link](#))

So often in life the truth of reality is difficult to accept especially when it seems not to be in our advantage to do so. This is a human trait which we all may experience at one time or another. Even though the facts and the truth of the matter are plainly evident we still may deny them and rationalize our way around them. We tend to think that this is a prominent trait within young people when they act in the face of reality as if they are exempt from the inevitable results. It's the “It can't happen to me” syndrome. It is as if there is that super human gene which exempts one's life from the truths of reality. The result may turn into life threatening or life changing circumstances. One sees that this as prevalent in drug addiction. It is also evident in the attitude that life owes me everything when life in fact it owes you only the next breath you take and even that is not assured.

But denying the realities of life do not stop at the doorstep of young people. Denying shows no age discrimination. For instance how many times do we put off going to a doctor when we are afraid of some symptoms which we may have. It is so easy to say they will go away because “It cannot happen to me”. We live in a time which exemplifies this. Even though statistically the reality is that we are still living during a deadly and life changing pandemic there are millions of people living in denial and willing to be misled by dangerous ideologies. This is in light of taking the proven effectiveness of vaccines and measures of slowing the spreading of the virus and relegating them as false premises. This is also in denying the reality that they are not only putting themselves in danger but everyone else.

The instinct to put off the probability of bad news and to deny its possible reality can be so easy to follow. This is exactly what happened with the disciples for Mark writes “...for he was teaching His disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.” This of course was not anything which they wanted to hear no less believe. Who would want to hear such bad news about a close friend? Who would want to hear such news about someone you had been following because you believed that person would become a national and powerful political leader? Besides, who could believe, no less understand, such a statement when it ended in what seemed to be total irrationality, “and three days after being killed, he will rise again”? What in the world did He mean by that? Mark then relates that they were afraid to ask him.

Their fear could have been because of Jesus previously lashing out at Peter for questioning His future or it could just have been that they simply didn't want to hear the reality of what was ahead and thus were in a state of denial. Being in a state of denial is most likely the case

because immediately afterward on their way to Capernaum they evidently still believed that Jesus was the political Messiah for they were arguing among themselves who was the greatest among them. This argument was all about who would receive the greatest positions of power and prestige in the new Kingdom of Israel. If they were not in denial than why argue about such a matter?

But the Kingdom which Jesus referred to throughout His ministry was not a kingdom controlled by power, wealth and prestige. Those who would be considered to be first in line in this Kingdom of God would not be those who sought power, wealth, and prestige in fact their position would be last. Now this must have been very confusing to the disciples for this isn't the way the system works. We may even be baffled by this for we look at societies, nations and kingdoms throughout history and they are dominated by power, prestige and wealth. After all the reality is the survival of the fittest while the oppressed, downtrodden, and weak are there to support those who are considered to be first in line. That is the reality we see throughout the world in

which enslavement is still very much a reality and the downtrodden are contained and suppressed. Every so often the suppression becomes too great and rebellions take place. James points this out, "For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will be disorder and wickedness of every kind." Even when the rebellions and revolutions are successful it seems they return to the same old system of dominance.

But the revolution which Jesus presents is far different for the first will be last and the last shall be first. And who are these that are considered to be last in earthly kingdoms? These are those who see life beyond their own egos, pride, and selfish wants. Jesus said "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Those that society place on the bottom rung are those who serve others and their ambition is to help their fellow man. We can see this in the breakdown of occupational salaries as to where our priorities are in our society today. But the revolution of Jesus gives a whole new reality to life for in the kingdom of God those who serve are those who are first.

Those who put service to others first may not become rich, famous and powerful but will find that they are able to bring about a positive change in life. Acts of selflessness may be seen by some as acts of weakness but to those who are the recipients of these acts are a sign of great strength and compassion. These are the acts which give life and do not take life. These acts are not driven by lobbyist, favor seekers, or even praise givers. These acts are not motivated by greed or wealth. These acts are not fueled by prestige. These acts are not born out of prejudice or out of partiality.

Those who will be first in the Kingdom of God are those who in spite of their own needs and even circumstances in life give of themselves in service to others. This is what true leadership is all about. It is not about wealth, prestige, greed, and power. But I am afraid that such leadership would be denied because people would then be expected to follow the example of

their leader. This may just be too much of a price to pay in terms of our pursuit of societal goals. This just may be a sacrifice which we are not willing to make.

But this is the cost of becoming first in God's Kingdom for this kingdom is governed by love. Love is not all about self but self pays the price in loving. Love is self-giving and therefore may be said to be self-sacrificing and not self-serving. Unfortunately all too many are fearful of such a self-giving love and thus are in denial of seeing the benefits and rewards which may come from such a love. This denial blinds them to the reality of the message and life of Jesus and thereby only see what they want to see, read what they want to read, hear what they want to hear and thereby believe what they want to believe. They customize their Christianity to suit themselves and shut out and deny what may ask them to change and to see what this love of God means in their lives.

The reality of the Gospel cannot be denied it is there for all of us to live. It is even there when we wish to deny it. We do not have the excuse which the disciples had of not knowing what was going to happen. It happened and God's love was proven to us in light of the cross and reaffirmed with the resurrection. If we deny living a life of self-giving, if we deny the life of service and the promotion of such a life, and if we deny the life of living God's love, we deny the cross and the resurrection. "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

Jesus made this point very clear for "... he took a child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcome me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'" You see a child is dependent upon us to give them their needs to live but cannot give in return those things which we may seek which promote our lives. It is when we see and live life as we see a little child that we will actually know what it is like to be first in God's kingdom. We will then know what God's love is like in our lives and not the life we may customize to suit ourselves and deny that which will bring God's eternal love to us.

Anthem: ["Lord God, We Praise You"](#)

Offering*: ([On-Line giving Link](#))

We give thee but thine own, what e'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.

The Prayer

Loving Father, You have given us the gift of your creation in which to live. The realities of this gift are set before us as simple truths which give us beauty and sustenance of life. When these realities come into conflict with our own selfish ambitions we like to deny them as untrue. Help us go beyond our own self-interest in order to see the truth in the realities which face us. Open

our lives to accept this truth which then motivate us to take the actions necessary to overcome the realities which can bring harm and life threatening consequences to not only our fellow human beings, but to all of life in this your creation. Grant us your wisdom in being true caretakers of the gift of life you have given us.

We pray for all who need your comforting and healing presence especially Bob and Pat Allen, Heidi Brackbill, Parker Brennan, the Cronin family, the Elshafei family, the Fultz family, the Johnson Family, Robert Karner, Charles Larsen, Donna Mayhew, Wendy Neumann, Elise Oliver, Peter Olsen, David Otto, Dottie Reitz, Robert Reitz, Linda Rigby, Colin Shea, Jerry Shea, Jack Smith, the Spiegler family,, Della , Yongyin Sun, Esther and Buck Trautwein, Linda Williamson, Wyatt Lee Wolf, Pastor Jack,
We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you;
The Lord lift up His presence upon you and give you peace. Amen

And now my brothers and sisters
Live on knowing God's love,
The joy of living this life of love,
And the peace which only comes through the power of His presence within you.
So live on in Love, Joy, Peace, and Power.

Closing Hymn: ["Thou, Whose Almighty Word"](#)

Announcement

Services will be outdoors unless inclement weather conditions force us indoors. Face masks and social distancing outdoors are not required. An email will be sent late Saturday afternoons stating whether indoors or outdoors.

*Offering to be sent to:
Bob Brackbill
10274 Raleigh Tavern Road
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Epiphany Lutheran Church
9122 Sybert Drive
Columbia Hills
Ellicott City, MD 21043
<https://www.epiphanylutherancolumbia.org>

Please note that you now have the opportunity of online giving with the link found after the offering designation or here: https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291