

17th SUNDAY after PENTECOST

September 19, 2021

COLLECT: GRANT US, O LORD, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

THE LESSONS: Old Testament: Wisdom of Solomon 1:16-21, 12-22

or Jeremiah 11:18-20

Psalm: 54

Epistle: James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

THE SERMON: In today's Gospel we find Jesus far from Jerusalem, he and his disciples are in the area of Galilee. He is not only spreading his teachings, but he wants to be away from the prying eyes and ears of the religious authorities. After he cleansed the temple of the animal sellers and money changers, he angered them. His raising Lazarus from the dead caused them to be amazed and fearful of him. They knew he was a holy man, a man empowered by God, but he was disrupting their hold on the people.

Some of his teaching was in opposition to the laws of Moses, his disciples didn't wash their hands before eating. He didn't require a sacrifice for healing people. He forgave people of their sins. This was normally done in the temple and required a sin offering of meat or grains. He healed people on the sabbath and he went into the homes of and healed Gentiles. All

these things were against the rules imposed on the Israelites by the religious authorities. Jesus taught that God gave the Jews the laws of Moses, the Ten Commandment, but the religious authorities created and imposed 613 rules on the daily lives of the people. This made it difficult for the people to live an unstressed life.

Jesus is also attracting large crowds and followers among the people and this too is also causing some concern to the religious authorities. If his teaching catches on there can be an economic impact on the temple. The priest and the people who work and live at the temple depend on the sacrifices: money, meat, and grains for their livelihood. Less people coming to the temple, less money and sacrifices.

So, you see, Jesus is not only in the area of Galilee to teach, but also for his safety. What he is doing takes some time to be reported back to Jerusalem.

While he is spreading his ministry, Jesus finds it is almost impossible to go anywhere without being discovered. Regardless of where he goes, soon there is a crowd and followers. Sometimes what he teaches is difficult for his followers to understand and accept so, they may stop following him.

An example is when he taught that he was the bread of life. During this teaching, he taught that whoever ate his body and drank his blood would have everlasting life. They would not die. This was hard for some of the followers to accept. Was Jesus asking them to be cannibals? There were kosher laws that said Jews should not be exposed to anything that may had blood in it. This applied to eating and cooking utensils as well as meat that had not been thoroughly drained of blood.

After some of the followers showed their opposition to this teaching by leaving Jesus, Jesus even asked his disciples if they too would leave. Although the teaching was difficult for them to understand, they vowed they would not leave him.

To make it easier for the disciples to understand, Jesus would also teach them using parables.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is teaching the disciples what was going to happen to him. He taught 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." The disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying, but were afraid to ask him to explain it further.

As they walked along on their way to Capernaum, Jesus noticed that they were in intense and animated discussion. Once they were in the house at Capernaum, Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about. They were silent, they didn't speak up, because they had been arguing about who was the greatest, the leader or who was in charge. The argument wasn't about after his death, but about then, the present time.

Jesus sat down and gathered his disciples around him. He said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." In this Jesus is saying the leader has a responsibility to take care of his followers before he begins to take care of himself. The leader has to see to it that the needs of and the questions of the followers have been adequately dealt with. Once this is done then he can turn to his needs.

A former parishioner, Larry Wood, had a word, that he shared with us that illustrates the meaning of what Jesus was saying. This I believe is

important for clergy leaders and fellow Christian leaders to know. It is JOY, J-O-Y, **JESUS, OTHERS,** (then) **YOURSELVES.**

Jesus illustrated it differently for his disciples. He called a small child to himself, perhaps sitting it on his knee, and said to them, “Whoever welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”

Let’s look at why I think Jesus demonstrated to them with the child. At its birth it is helpless just a mass of flesh. The child has to have all its needs met by someone else. A child is not independent, the child can’t provide for itself, it can’t work or grow food. The child has to be taught. The child listens to and watches others. The child may learn good or bad behavior, dependent on the environment the child is raised in. Whenever the child is displeased about something he or she cries. When they are pleased, they smile or laugh out loud.

So, the child learns from what he or she sees, hears or how they are dealt with. To raise a good child, one must be attentive, kind, patient, compassionate, and always trying to do good things. Of course, there are other attributes you may add.

But regardless, of what they are, raising a child requires your total involvement. And we all know that a child’s needs often comes before our own.

You may think of a child as being an empty cup and it's your job to fill that cup. How will you handle it and what will you put in that cup? Will what you put in that cup help the child to lead a life that will be pleasing to and acceptable to God.

Now, as an adult, can you lift up your cup to the Lord and ask, **“Fill my cup Lord: Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more. Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole¹ ?”** Amen.

Rev. Lionel Starkes

1. These are words taken from the hymn FILL MY CUP LORD and I asked that it be sung immediately after my sermon.