



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

July 2, 2017

Promise: Word Secured

Matthew 19:13-14

"...for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."

Who owns the kingdom of heaven and to who does the kingdom of heaven belong? The questions long for answers in every age and time.

It is as if one is seeking to know who it is that owns God and the pathway to that power beyond all others. And in this and every time many claim to have that answer.

- ✠ For some, they believe that are the brokers of God and entrance into the presence of God. My way or the highway.
- ✠ For others, they despair and judge any truth about heavenly matters.
- ✠ Many would question the right of anyone to claim any access to God, the gods, or any ultimate power since for some there may be no such thing.
- ✠ I was once a Baptist and was pretty unsure that you could trust any other denomination and in the home I was raised in there was a deep concern about those "Roman Catholics."

For those of the first covenant, the people of the covenant to Abraham and Sarah, there was the sense that ONLY they were the chosen of the LORD. Yet, from the beginning, it was the path of Creator God to work for the good of all, in the mercy given that all might walk in promise of the God whose care would hold on to us forever.

Jeremiah broke the ground with the Promise: Word Secured...by...{1} Grace Initiated. The words would have broken AS IF God was totally about the path of undoing all that was old and broken to create an eternal seal which would last forever---these are the words which mark the promise for ALL --- "...for they (all people) shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; [LISTEN!] FOR I WILL FORGIVE THEIR INIQUITY, AND REMEMBER THEIR SIN NO MORE."

Can you imagine it? Past forgiven, clean slate; present recreated with a future guarantee that ALL IS FORGIVEN, RECONCILED, MADE NEW now and forever.

Here is what it sounded like today: "IN THE MERCY OF GOD...PROMISE MAKER, GRACE MARKER...CHRIST DIED FOR US, FOR YOU, WHILE WE WERE SINNERS; AND FOR HIS SAKE, GOD FORGIVES ALL/ALL OF YOUR SINS."

And that is all about {2} Faith Received. Martin Luther's point was always that grace is not inherent; as if you are born filled with grace, but that grace was a gift given, wholly and freely given without any merit of our own. You can't earn it, find it...faith itself is a gift given by grace under the power of the Holy Spirit.

GRACE ALONE AND FAITH ALONE are the bonafides of God for you and for me because NO ONE holds the "God-Franchise" as their own to give away. Recall the old story? A person is receiving the first tour of heaven. Angel guide instructs that the next moments must be made with tip-toe silence... "Shh, those are the Lutherans. They think they are the only ones here."

That is the point of Paul's writing to Rome: grace finds a way for mercy to abound in Christ, the one who died for us, lived for us, now with us in the Holy Spirit. And buried into Christ's death in Holy Baptism, we are raised to newness of life as a resurrection people. So that...our Second Lesson has it...we live out our unity in welcoming and encouraging one another, being an inviting church, that--

✠ God's steadfastness and encouragement might: GRANT US HOPE, TO LIVE IN HARMONY, THAT TOGETHER WE MIGHT BE IN MISSION, WORSHIP AND SERVE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST as...{3} All God's Children in Mission.

And that brings us to the words of Jesus in Matthew 19. Events are pretty intense as Jesus is moving ever towards Jerusalem. His word and work ministry has taught much to His own, His miracles astounded, His growing conflict with the Pharisees of old, the Charter Members of the first covenant.

The turn comes, the tipping point begins, as Jesus enters the region of Judea, when suddenly, children are brought to him to touch and to pray with them. Seemingly an interruption in the "Jesus Intensive Course" just before what we know as Palm Sunday.

What happens? The disciples "rebuked" those who brought them; kids not of much value in those times and even in the time of Rome when Matthew wrote his Jesus story; "Away with them, no time now, Master is busy. We must guard His time and space." As if "Your call is important to us, but... no one is available right now."

Jesus bids all --- "Let them come to me, these children, don't stop them. To such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And we know, don't we, how children receive a gift. Hands open, hearts wide, voice clear in thanksgiving."

Here it seems is the point: The word "children" is meant from earliest infancy to 12. These ones who are dependent, non-initiators, and small. They were brought!

The disciples thought that only those "more able" should come to the teacher. The teaching is clear that Jesus saves not only repentant adults, but dependent children and all those we might think to be incompetent. "For God so loved THE WORLD!"

Martin Luther turns it: "Children are brought to baptism through other's faith and works. But when they are brought there and when baptism puts them in Christ's place, then Christ blesses them and gives them faith and the kingdom of heaven." Why? Because Christ can work even what appears small miracles as children are seen to be the hallmarks of the kingdom that Jesus enfolds.

We are all in so many ways "Little Disciples." Who like children find joy in being forgiven, reconciled, enfolded and loved (which may be the best word in the world!)

What would it be like for us to treat each other as we do a child? Taking time, clear actions of love, words of care. What would it be like in our world if we really believed that the children are listening, watching, those whom Jesus lifted and in-folded. Might we do the same for each other, for those we meet in our day, in our world?

Some years ago, Meg Marcrander and I felt compelled to create a deepening ministry to our children from the Font, through Faith Stepping Stones, that all might be discipleFit! We read a book by John Westerhoff. WILL OUR FAITH HAVE CHILDREN. Note that it is not Will our children have faith?

His point was clear. Find ways that the church can honor each person from the beginnings of BORROWED FAITH (birth to around 12), to DOUBTING FAITH (adolescence to around 100), to OWNED FAITH which is the goal of God for all.

That is the foundation of the path to being discipleFIT! For growth in our mission, our ministries today in this place. Where are you on the continuum as a child of God?

Summer time...the livin' seems easy. Might it be for us a time charging anew for the storehouse of our trust in God, our walk with Christ, our renewal in the power of the Holy Spirit?

This was media week at Saint Andrew's: July-August VOICE, the Sunday bulletin which does not seem to shrink much in July and August. Find places to learn, to serve, to fellowship, but most importantly to be at worship. For here is the place of renewal, foundations reset, as we (YES!) GATHER TO ENCOURAGE, TO BE EQUIPPED, AND TO BE SENT.

For we are all the children of God...little ones...humble ones...reconciled ones with sins forgiven to walk in newness of life.

May the compass of the Holy Spirit set us into new and deeper directions as a congregation that seeks only to learn more of Jesus and His ways. Amen.