

Worship Resources - [*Finishing Last*](#)

Pentecost 17, Year B,

19th September, 2021

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a NRSV / Mark 9:30-37 NRSV

Prelude

Welcoming Guests/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Call to Worship (Responsive)

One: Who among you is seeking the wisdom of God?

All: We long to hear God's Word spoken to our hearts.

One: Who among you is seeking God's bright and holy truth?

All: We long to learn the ways of wisdom and righteousness.

One: Who among you is seeking a Spirit-filled life?

All: We long to live lives of holiness and light.

One: _God grants God's wisdom generously to all who ask._ Come near, people of God! Let us worship in wisdom and truth.

Invocation

God of holy wisdom, we are seekers on the way to a deeper wisdom and a wider vision. Our lives are full of information and opinions, but in the midst of it all we long to hear the voice of wisdom – Your wisdom, God – cutting through the noise and teaching us how to live.

God, we have come here this morning to learn wisdom from your Word, from your Holy Spirit, and from one another. We have come so that wisdom may call us out of the darkness and into the light. We have come to have the deeper, richer wisdom-filled life that you have promised to each of us.

O God, make us ready to hear the Words spoken to our hearts this morning.

Call us to hear your wisdom and grant us the courage to respond.

Together we pray as you taught your disciples to pray...

Our Father,

who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kin-dom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kin-dom, the power, and the glory,
forever and ever, Amen.

Opening Music (Lyric Video)

Holy, Holy, Holy

words by Reginald Huber,
performed by Altar of Praise Men's Chorale,
posted to YouTube by SE Samonte

https://youtu.be/FZ_qWkaAY0A

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

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.

But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.

Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish.

For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for[a] those who make peace.

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?

You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet[b] something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Hymn (Lyric Video)

Breathe on Me Breath of God

words by Edwin Hatch,
music by Robert Jackson Trentham,
posted to YouTube by THENBA and used with permission

<https://youtu.be/MmkzSjs9eAw>

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Servant God;

be with those who are not seen and heard in the world, because of their gender or age; their caste or race; their sexuality or lifestyle; their poverty or history. Open our ears and eyes, to hear and see all people as yours.

God of little children, be with all children, wherever they live, whoever their parents are, whatever their needs, that they would all be welcomed and nourished, enabled to be all you want them to be. Open our hearts and arms, to welcome all your children.

God of love; be with all who live with fear, fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of being labelled, fear of themselves or others, fear of you. Open us all to your endless love, that it might drive out fear.

Teacher God, be with us all, as we struggle to make sense of your world and your word, as your church, in our communities, as your disciples. Open our minds and hearts, to learn from you.

God of all, Father, Son and Spirit, hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken, offered from the darkness and hope of our hearts, Amen

Gospel Reading **Mark 9:30-37 NRSV**

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;

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.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?"

But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Message – *Finishing Last*

When we think of Jesus and children, is it images similar to this that come to our mind? Tranquil, pastoral shots like this, with Jesus being the metaphor of the good shepherd, taking care of his young lambs. Perhaps our internal dialogue begins reciting the words of the old song, “Jesus loves the little children.” This portrayal is very comforting for us, as we imagine Jesus looking out for and protecting our most beloved family members from harm and pain, giving them comfort and praise. While that is certainly a lovely image, and one I wholeheartedly affirm, our passage from Mark goes a little beyond this simple image of loving care and support.

Too often we approach scripture from our modern perspective and circumstances, which can cause us to lose the core message scripture would have had for the original audience it was written for. Certainly children today are more vulnerable than adults, but it was another set of circumstances altogether for children in the first century CE. The young ones of Jesus' age had no rights, and were generally considered a liability, as they did not contribute to the power and prestige of the family and household. In fact, they cost resources with no immediate return for the investment. And a risky investment they were.

In an age without modern medicine and all the progress made in treatments in the intervening millennia, there was a real chance that they would not survive to adulthood and show any return for the effort put into their care. It may sound harsh to us, who often take great care to encourage our kids to look to the future of college and career, and all the potential success that awaits them. But that was the reality of an honor based culture. Your power, prestige, and reputation were what made you who you were in those times. And while many in our own society value these same ideals to be important and guiding factors as well, the reality is quite different. To lose these today usually does not result in quite the same circumstances. One generally doesn't lose everything and end up on the street when

their image is tarnished. But in that world, to lose honor and power was to become an outcast, a pariah that no one would associate, or more importantly, be seen doing business with.

So everything was oriented to continuing to increase one's power and prestige, to continue to move up the ladder and feel more secure in one's circumstances. From that perspective, children were of little value. When Jesus pulls this random child into his arms, he's pulling in one of the most marginalized categories of people to himself, showing the value they have to "the one who sent him" and affirming their worth just as they are, without needing to provide merit to justify their relevance. In doing so, he indirectly is illustrating the irony and folly of the argument his disciples just were engaging in among themselves as to who was the greatest disciple. Jesus in two phrases completely upends their debate and actually drives them to silence. Yet again he points out the contrast between the way the world works and how God works in the upside down kin-dom.

What about us in this day and age? What is our priority? Do we focus on maintaining our own place and position? I mentioned earlier that while those things don't have the same influence they once did, We cannot deny that much of what our world values is largely based on power and status. After all, there is now an entire class of people who make their living through influence, actually having the job title "influencer."

From a church perspective, certainly there are those who seek position and privilege, but I would say there is more a sense of wanting the comfort of being surrounded by those who are most like us. People who share more life experiences with us, which is natural because we can more easily identify with those whose journeys have been more like our own. We can understand their challenges and struggles because they have been our own as well. We like comfortable. But Jesus is making the opposite argument. We need to go out of our way to welcome the "children" of today, those who are viewed as "lesser," those who are at the margins and lack the same value as those who are more "acceptable."

Jesus is indirectly telling us that "comfortable" is not a Christian value. We need to welcome those who are not valued, those who aren't like us. We need to bring them in our embrace and show them they have value just the way they are, without changing to meet our expectations, without making us "comfortable" to have them around. Jesus is making the point that it's about them not us, that we are to be servants to all. It is not up to them to change to make us comfortable, but for us to accept them as they are. That is the difference

between “welcoming” and “affirming.” Being uncomfortable is part of following Jesus, of carrying your own cross.

Our own denomination has been struggling for quite awhile now to be more diverse, to attract others not like us. But are we willing to make the changes in ourselves necessary to be able to truly value and affirm those who are not like us? A lot of the bigger church's attention has been on adding more people of color to our ranks, but is that the only group that is missing? Are there others who feel they lack value, that don't feel affirmed as equal children of God? Sadly, we all too easily find reasons to justify not changing to be more welcoming and hospitable to those who are not like us. We can be masters at finding reasons not to fully accept the other among us, often loosely, and I mean loosely, based on some scriptural detail, often taken out of context and out of character. Jesus is not looking for our evaluative skills here, but our valuative talents.

Carrying our own cross is not comfortable by definition. What changes can we make to welcome those who are often excluded into our ranks? How can we be Christ to them? Maybe that's something we need to give some serious prayer and thought to. I guarantee it's not the state of our buildings or our furnishings that are keeping them away. Let's face it, we like our comfortable way of doing things. I'm just as guilty. It's easy for me to just keep tooling our worship and fellowship opportunities the way we've done it for so long. But is that meaningful to others who aren't like us, who aren't like me? And how do we make it more universal, something that is of value to those who are the other? Maybe that's our homework. Let's think about how we can have those same open arms that draw the “children” of our world here. How can we be servants to all?

Let's pray and reflect on it, and share our thoughts in the comments of the live streams, the website or through email to myself or the church. I hope and pray we can find ways to value those who feel they have none, and provide the lift and value they so desperately need. May it be so, Amen.

A Call to Serve

We would not steal for ourselves what God has entrusted to us for the benefit of our world neighbors. We would not claim as our own what God has loaned to us for our management in this lifetime. Therefore, we bring our offerings in joyful trust and service.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Generous God, our lives are renewed as we remember your goodness. You have made us in your image and placed in our hearts the memory of your love made flesh in Jesus Christ. That memory calls us to give and to embrace your world as we offer these gifts. May our lives invested through these offerings create a new reality and extend your grace in remembrance of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

HYMN (Lyric Video) *In Christ There Is No East Or West*

words by William Dunkerly,
performed by St. Martin In The Fields, London,
posted to YouTube by opatriamia

<https://youtu.be/TpITJOShix0>

Commissioning/Benediction

Remember one of the secrets of success according to Jesus:
“If you want to feel great, be willing to come last and to gladly serve others.”

May God give you the faith and love to put this into practice,
and the humility to permit others to do the same for you.

Amen!

**Depart from this house of prayer with restored hopes and renewed enthusiasm.
And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,**