

The 15th Sunday after Pentecost
“God’s loving, unrelenting will to save the lost!” (Matthew 18:14)
September 10, 2023
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 15th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 18:14.

“Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

So far the text...

Every year at this time of year, we come down the homestretch in the baseball season and teams are in a battle for a playoff spot. Last year’s reigning champs, the Astros, have climbed back into first place to the enjoyment of many Astros fans we have in the valley. Well, the disciples came to Jesus and served up a hanging curve ball that didn’t break. It just hung there waiting for Jesus to hit it out of the park. And He did.

What was the hanging curveball? The opening verse of our Gospel from Matthew 18 – a question posed by the disciples.

“Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Watch out! Jesus sizes up the pitch and sends it out of the park. How? In a way that is the exact opposite of what was expected. He brings in a little child to their midst, a little one. Jesus’ words were not being fully understood by the disciples so He teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven with a real life, living breathing child. This is what My Kingdom is all about. The humble faith of child who believes in Me! It’s about grace! Not about power! For clearly this child does not have intelligence or abilities to rule in My Kingdom. But listen to me carefully.

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore

whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”

Simple, trusting faith in Jesus – converted from trust in one’s own power, goodness, might self-righteousness, self-perceived greatness to complete reliance on Jesus’ power to save, His Goodness, His righteousness, His greatness of love for all people. One cannot force one’s entrance into Jesus’ Kingdom of Heaven, any more than a little child could force himself or herself to a throne of power. It is a gift of God. It is the Father’s will that all men should be saved. So we know this from 1 Timothy 2:4.

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,”

God’s will is that not one of these little ones who believe in Me should be lost. Not one! Who is a little one? Of course, a small child who by the power of the Holy Spirit can believe in Jesus. The Greek word that Jesus uses here in Matthew is – padia. Think pre-school, just starting to talk and walk. Yes, God gives them faith too which they express in the simplest confession – Jesus loves me!

God gives the gift of baptism to them that they be converted and sealed in their faith. What they cannot do God does for them. Baptism is 100% God’s work which claims a sinful child and washes the child of all sin in the regenerative water and Word of baptism, and makes this child the son or daughter of the King!

And you know what, God doesn’t limit His saving will to small children. He wants all children to be saved. And so Jesus clearly tells us in Luke 18 that His Kingdom of Heaven includes infants too!

“15 Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them to Him and said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 17 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”

The Greek word that Jesus uses here is *brefos*. Yes! Infants are included also in My Kingdom of Heaven. But if a small child is completely unable to gain entrance into God's Kingdom by might and power, how in the world can an infant do it?

An infant can't. All people are born with original sin. So, Jesus explains in our Gospel.

“Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

There are offenses from within – that is our own sinful flesh. And offenses from without – from the world, from those who entice, tempt and lead astray children to sin. How deeply serious Jesus is about those who would lead a child astray is clear in what Jesus says is the fitting punishment for these evil people.

““But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

How does a little one sin? By not keeping the 10 commandments, of course. If a child is taught that it is ok to not honor parents and other authorities, (our epistle from Romans 13), to not remember the Sabbath day by not coming to church, that it's ok to steal, and curse and lie and swear, tempting children with drugs, forcing them into trafficking,... then those responsible are to be held accountable with millstones around the neck.

How great is the love of God for little ones that He would not allow such offenses to go unpunished. He uses His law to protect little ones from the course outbursts of evil men and women.

But, His Kingdom of the left, of power is not enough to save any souls. Yes, Jesus says, the authorities of government exist by His power alone for our good. And yes, as Jesus said in the previous chapter, Matthew 17, that we must pay taxes. Jesus even told Peter to go get a fish and look in its mouth. He found a coin to pay the taxes. For God is ruler over all the world and He wants there to be order in the world and good government.

But God's Kingdom of the left cannot save a soul. It's temporal. And to think that your goal is to become the greatest in this world is completely confused thinking.

Jesus' disciples were not thinking the things of God, but the things of men, when they asked who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

For Jesus asks, **“What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?”**

“From strangers” Peter answered. **“Then the sons are free”**, was Jesus' answer.

You are sons of the King by grace Jesus is teaching us, sons of the Kingdom of the right through faith. Yes, you are living in the Kingdom of the left, at the same time. Pay the taxes for Me and you Peter from the coin from the fishes' mouth. But, the word of truth that sets you free comes from My mouth.

This truth Jesus repeated again and again.

“The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, 23 and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.” (Matthew 17:22-23)

This is how God's Kingdom of heaven is established. Not by power. But by the humbling, suffering and death of Jesus for all people's sins. This is the saving will of the Father that He would give His Son to rescue all people.

And yes, this saving will includes little children and infants. But how? For a child or an infant can do nothing. That is the point! God opens the Kingdom of Heaven with His Keys of forgiveness that He gives to the church to use.

“18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

God's unrelenting saving will for all people becomes manifest by His gift of forgiveness to sinful men on earth – absolution, the means of grace – baptism and the Lord's Supper.

And through the gift of baptism, yes infants can and do enter the kingdom of heaven as they receive the gift of the washing of their sins. For of such also belongs the Kingdom of heaven. And they are included in the command to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!

God searches for them, rescues them as a shepherd searches for his one lost sheep. God sends His angels , their angels, to protect them and watch over them. Yes, God's will is that not one be lost. Not one child of God, man, woman or child be lost. That is His saving will for each of you, little ones of the Father who humbly trust in Him and find your sole greatness in the great love of Jesus for you! Amen

Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)