

Proper 19 (Pentecost 16), 2009

Text: Mark 9:30-37

Title: A Child's Faith

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Families define us. They make us who we are.

You were born as someone's son or daughter, given a place within a family. Families give us people to care for us, and people for us to care for. It's how God orders His creation.

When God became man, He became part of a real human family, with a mom and a dad, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Families are important to us. Our mission statement here at Faith is, "Reaching out to build Christ-centered families of Faith."

Two weeks ago we saw what it meant to be a mother of faith- to pray and beg and plead from Jesus, to look to Him for everything.

Last week we saw a father of faith who prayed for faith, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."

Having a Christ centered family of faith does not mean having a picture perfect family, where everyone is well-behaved and no one ever fights. And it doesn't mean that you'll have a perfect faith and never have any questions and doubts.

A Christ-centered family of Faith looks to Christ and trusts in Him for everything. That's what a family of Faith is. Now what does a family of faith do? How does a family of faith live together and care for one another?

This week Jesus shows us how to live together as a family. And He starts with the children.

Families are all about children. That's why God put husband and wife together in the first place- He created them male and female that they might be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth.

God didn't create the whole world just for Adam and Eve- He wanted more and more people to enjoy living in His creation. So God gave us the ability to bring children into this world. And families are the places where we nurture and care for children.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus shows us how to live together as his family. It's all about the children. Children need constant care and attention. Children can't take care of themselves. From birth, children can't do anything for themselves. Children depend on their parents for everything- food, clothing, shelter, protection, love and care- they need all of these things.

Children are needy. Children can't care for themselves. Children can't provide for themselves. They depend on their family to care for them.

Many of you know what it's like to care for children. Some of you are also caring for grandchildren and great-grandchildren. You know all about the late-night feedings and constant diaper changes, about the stress and the expense of raising children. Children are not only needy in a physical sense, but in an emotional and spiritual sense as well. Raising children is more than just making sure they are fed and clothed, but in caring for the emotion and spiritual needs of the whole person.

It's a thankless job. Literally. Babies can't say thank you. They are not aware of everything you do for them. We actually have to teach our children to say thank you.

But you don't really care about that, do you. You're not in it to be thanked. You don't care for your kids and grandkids because you want to be thanked. You do it because you love them. Even if they forget to say thanks, you'll never stop loving them.

Today Jesus tells us that this is what family life is all about. This is what Christian life is all about. Jesus says, "Whoever receives one of these children receives me." He even takes a child and physically puts him there in front of the disciples to show them as an object lesson. Having a Christ-centered family of faith means taking care of children.

You see, the disciples don't quite get it. They've been arguing about who is the greatest, who's the best, who's the top dog. The disciples are like a family, and they fight just like brothers and sisters often do. They argue over who is mom and dad's favorite, who gets the best presents, who got the biggest dessert, whose turn it is to lick the beaters.

For the disciples, family life is about looking out for yourself and what you can get out of it. It's a struggle to get to the top and edge out your brothers and sisters. It's a competition for the love and affection of your parents. For many of us, this is what family life is like, it's a power struggle. But children have a way of changing all that.

When couples first get married, it's easy for them to be focused on themselves. Their top priority is often their career or their lifestyle. They want to enjoy life, to travel and to accumulate as much stuff as they can.

All of that changes with children. When kids come, suddenly your priorities change. It's no longer all about you and your spouse, but everything now revolves around your children. Children evoke a sense of self-sacrifice. Children teach us how to love. There's nothing you wouldn't do, no cost too great for your children.

When the disciples argue about greatness, Jesus says, "If you want to be great, be a babysitter. Take care of a kid. Change a few diapers, wipe a few snotty noses. And in that way you'll be showing love to me and to my father."

Those who are great are not those who fight their way to the top, who manage to elbow out those around them, but those who set aside their pride and their ego to care for the helpless ones.

That's what families do. That's what families are for- to love and care for one another, especially the weak and the helpless. Sometimes it's the youngest members of the family who need the most care. Sometimes it's the oldest. Many of you are now caring for your parents or your spouse. And in caring for them, you are showing love to Christ.

To have a Christ-centered family of faith means to love and care for the weak and the needy, just like Christ did.

The disciples didn't understand what Jesus was up to. Jesus tells them plainly what He was about to do, everything that was going to happen. Jesus said, "The Son of Man will be handed over into the hands of men, and they will kill Him and after He has died, on the third day He will rise." But the disciples didn't understand, and they were too afraid to ask Jesus what He was talking about.

It's clear that the disciples didn't understand. While they are still on the road, they start arguing over who is the greatest.

Who is the greatest? Jesus is the greatest.

What makes Jesus great? The fact that Jesus humbled Himself and died on our behalf.

Because of our sinfulness, we are the children, the infants, the helpless ones. On our own, we could never care for ourselves. We could never do anything to save ourselves. We're like tiny, helpless babies, needing constant care.

But we are God's children. He adopted us in Holy Baptism and made us a part of His family. We now have God as our Father. We are children of faith who depend on God for everything.

And He cares for us more deeply than any earthly mother or father ever could.

God gave His very life for His children. Jesus humbled Himself, and died for us. He made the ultimate sacrifice for us children.

Sometimes we're ungrateful children. We forget to thank God for even the most basic things that He does for us. Everything we have come as a gift from Him. But, like our children, we don't say thank you. We just assume that God will take care of us.

But God isn't in it for our thanks and praise. He does it all for us because He loves us.

By His death and resurrection God shows us how to care for our families. The same Spirit self-sacrifice that took Jesus all the way to the cross is present in our families as we care for the weak and the helpless among us, the children, the elderly, the poor, the oppressed. Caring for the

vulnerable, that was what Jesus taught His disciples, that was what makes one great, that is what Jesus came to do.

To have a Christ-centered family of faith is to love one another in such a way, to show one another the same love that Christ has shown you. A family of faith puts their faith into action through sacrificial love.

Two weeks ago it was a mother of faith begging for her daughter. Last week it was a father of faith who prayed for faith. Today it's children of faith, in the care of our loving father.

Next week we see how big our family actually is.