

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## I. Who is the Greatest

A. Jesus and his Disciples are now beginning to make their way South, toward Jerusalem and the Cross.

1. For the most part, Jesus has completed his public ministry.

2. He is no longer worried about winning new Disciples, now his focus is on teaching the ones he has.

3. And as they go, he tells them again straight out what will happen to him, *“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.”*

4. But they don't want to hear it – it's totally out of the realm of possibility for them; so as they journey they begin to debate with one another as to who is the greatest among them.

5. So after dinner, he asks them what they were talking about so forcefully back on the road.

6. And the silence was deafening – they didn't say a word – they were too EMBARRASSED to answer him.

7. So Jesus kind of shakes his head and says to them, *“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”*

8. Once again, he takes their world-view and turns it up-side-down.

9. Obviously the Greatest is the one with the most power – but instead Jesus says, it is the one who is the servant – the one who is the least of all.

B. And to illustrate his point, Jesus brings over a young child, and takes it in his arms and says, *“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me, but the one who sent me.”*

1. Remember, in Jesus’ day, a child was not the cute little over-indulged individual that we know and love.

2. In Jesus’ day, Women and Children were considered second class citizens – in fact, a child was little better than the property of its father.

3. A child had no rights, no privileges, and little importance – the only thing it was good for was to grow up and get to work; and the sooner the better.

4. So, Jesus takes this child and puts it right in the middle of them and says, *“Whoever welcomes one such child welcomes me...”*

5. So then, a Disciple proves to be a **true servant** when they are welcoming and taking care of the needs of the **unimportant**.

6. The warning here for the Disciples and US, is that it is easy to do something for someone who can return the favor – or for someone who can reward you for what you do.

7. By putting a child among them, Jesus tells the Disciples and US, that whoever welcomes a **“Child”** – welcomes the poor – welcomes the needy – welcomes the unpopular – welcomes the hard to love – and **SERVES THEM**, welcomes **HIM** – and not only Him, but God.

## II. Being True followers of Jesus

A. We have had an amazing example of this kind of **Life of Service** in the life and witness of Agnes Bojaxhui.

1. In her life and ministry, she embodied Jesus’ teaching more than anyone else since St. Francis.

2. She left the comfort and ease of teaching in a Boarding School for India's elite families for the **streets of Calcutta** to serve, as she put it , **“the Poorest of the Poor.”**

3. The world today, of course, knows her as **Mother Teresa**.

4. Mother Teresa's concerns were always for the poor, the dying, the social outcasts, and yes, even children.

5. She did amazing things to help them live the end of their days so they could die with dignity – and she inspire others to live in the same way too.

6. She never said, “That's it, I've done enough,” it was always the opposite as she looked to do ever more.

7. And it was this very work, her love and concern for the sick and dying, for the poor and needy, that gained her great fame – even a Nobel Peace Prize.

8. In living this life of **CONSTANT SERVICE**, she truly was living out Jesus' Commandment – and she is Great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

9. Who is the Greatest?

- “Whoever wants to be first, must be last of all and servant of all.”

B. So how can we do this?

1. How can we live a life of service?

2. We are not all called to be Mother Teresa's – but we are called to live in service to others.

3. So how can we do it?

- How do we live a life of service – providing even an infinitesimal amount of good in the world that she did?

4. Perhaps we need to go back and look at the model Jesus placed before his Disciples – the faith of a child.

C. Recently when talking about what would happen if Jesus suddenly appeared a friend said, “All the adults would cower in fear, and all the children would run to him gladly.”

- And I think there is more than a little truth to that statement.

1. Children have a unique and special relationship with God.

2. They are unfettered by all the “worldly concerns of life” and approach God with unbridled joy – experiencing God as love and relationship.

3. Jesus says we have to be last – we need to put the concerns of others ahead of our own.

4. We need to be like children, without all the preconceived notions, and be ready to help in any way we can.

5. We need to reconnect with experiencing God as pure love and just bask in it, and absorb all we can.

6. And then approach the big bad world with the simple faith of a child.

D. Perhaps this story can help.

1. A mother writes: Last week I took my children to a restaurant. My six-year-old son asked if he could say grace.

2. As we bowed our heads he said, “God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if Mom gets us ice-cream for dessert. And Liberty and justice for all! Amen!”

3. Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, I heard a woman remark, “That’s what’s wrong with this country. Kids today don’t even know how to pray. Asking God for ice-cream!”

4. Hearing this, my son burst into tears and asked me, “Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?”

5. As I held him and assured him that he had done a terrific job and God was certainly not mad at him, an elderly gentleman approached the table.

6. He winked at my son and said, “I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer.”

- “Really?” my son asked.

- “Cross my heart,” the man replied.

7. Then in a theatrical whisper he added (indicating the woman whose remark had started this whole thing), “Too bad she never asks God for ice-cream. A little ice-cream is good for the soul sometimes.”

8. Naturally I bought my kids ice-cream at the end of the meal.

9. My son stared at his for a moment, and then did something I will remember the rest of my life.

10. He picked up his sundae and without a word, walked over and placed it in front of the woman.

- With a big smile he told her, “Here, this is for you. Ice-cream is good for the soul sometimes; and my soul is good already.”

[PAUSE]

### III. Living the Faith of a Child

A. Jesus welcomed a little child to remind the Disciples and us that we have the need to be servants of all.

1. But who are God’s children?

2. And the answer, as we all know, is each and every one of us.

3. Every person WE come into contact with is a CHILD of GOD;

- our next door neighbor

- the cranky person up the street

- the homeless person begging for change in the parking lot

- the person at work we go out of our way to avoid

- the one on the committee we would rather not be trapped with

- all of them are CHILDREN of GOD.

4. And as CHILDREN of GOD we are called to serve THEM.

5. And how do we serve them?

- By putting their needs first – and our needs last.

B. As we read in our NT Lesson: *“For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.*

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

1. If someone seeks to be the GREATEST that means that someone else is going to be denied what is due them.

2. Instead, the letter of James says that *true wisdom* is shown forth through living a good life with **works** that are done for one another, born out of our relationship with God.

3. And what is true for the individual is also true for our community.

4. As we strive to rebuild our **mission and ministry** following COVID, we need to always keep this in mind.

5. As I wrote about in this month’s newsletter, as the Vestry continues to discern what we are being called to in this time and place, we have tweaked our Mission Statement just a bit to say: **Seeking to live Christ’s love in a caring and inclusive community.**

6. And as a reminder of what we are called to do as the people of God in this place, we will say this as part the Dismissal at the end of the service, that we may be sent out in a spirit of Christ’s love and service.

## Conclusion

A child may be closer to God than we are, especially when it comes to a loving relationship with God.

Think about your relationship with God.

Are there childlike qualities that you could do with a bit more of;  
- qualities such as wonder, or simplicity or hope?

And what ambitions or agendas might be getting in the way; in the way of living a life of service, and your relationship with God?

*“If any want to be my disciples, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.”*

*“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”*

What is preventing you from serving “the other” in your life?

## Let Us Pray

Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us that in ministering to the needs of others we are ministering to you: Fill our hearts, we pray, with your own Spirit of love and self-sacrifice, and teach us to see you in all those who suffer that we may serve them gladly for your sake; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (Colquhoun #1625)