

Sunday, October 6, 2024 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Today's gospel combines a saying that makes many of us uncomfortable with a story we find comforting. Jesus' saying on divorce is another of his rejections of human legislation in favor of the original intent of God's law. Jesus' rebuke of the disciples who are fending off the children should challenge us as well. What does it mean to receive the kingdom of God as a child does?

Prayer of the Day

Sovereign God, you have created us to live in loving community with one another. Form us for life that is faithful and steadfast, and teach us to trust like little children, that we may reflect the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Job 1:1-1; 2:1-10

¹There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

^{2:1}One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. ²The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ³The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." ⁴Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. ⁵But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." ⁶The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

⁷So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

⁹Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." ¹⁰But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Psalm 26

¹Give judgment for me, O LORD, for I have lived with integrity;

I have trusted in the LORD and have not faltered.

²**Test me, O LORD, and try me;**

examine my heart and my mind.

³For your steadfast love is before my eyes;

I have walked faithfully with you.

⁴**I have not sat with the worthless,
nor do I consort with the deceitful.**

⁵I have hated the company of evildoers;

I will not sit down with the wicked.

⁶**I will wash my hands in innocence, O LORD,
that I may go in procession round your altar,**

⁷singing aloud a song of thanksgiving
and recounting all your wonderful deeds.

⁸**LORD, I love the house in which you dwell
and the place where your glory abides.**

⁹Do not sweep me away with sinners,
nor my life with those who thirst for blood,

¹⁰**whose hands are full of evil plots,
and their right hands full of bribes.**

¹¹As for me, I will live with integrity;
redeem me, and be gracious to me.

¹²**I take my stand on level ground;
in the full assembly I will bless the LORD.**

Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

¹Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

^{2:5}Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶But someone has testified somewhere,

"What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
or mortals, that you care for them?

⁷You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned them with glory and honor,

⁸subjecting all things under their feet."

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made

lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹²saying,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters,
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16

²Some Pharisees came, and to test [Jesus] they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” ⁵But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Prayers of Intercession

Challenged by God's Word in Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and the whole creation.

A brief silence.

God of our ancestors, we give thanks for the church in all times. May we listen for the prophets of this age who bear messages that stir the church toward renewal and justice. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Creator of every creature on earth, direct our lives toward the renewal and sustaining of cattle, birds of the air, animals of the field, and those who share our homes. Reveal the ways we can work alongside creation for the health and well-being of all. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Sovereign God, we give thanks that you are mindful and benevolent to even us, mere mortals. Accompany us when hardness of heart gets in the way of justice between people and nations. Endow leaders with minds for justice and hearts for compassion. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Restoring Lord, grant healing and wholeness to those who are sick and suffering. Work through medical professionals to diagnose, ease pain, and give life to all who seek their wisdom and experience. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Unifying God, humans were created for relationship with the earth, its creatures, and one another. Forgive us when division threatens companionship, mutual support, and unity among us. May your love inspire us to build supportive communities of faith where all are cherished. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

God of resurrection, you prepare a place in the kingdom through Christ's death and resurrection. We give thanks for the saints who have taken their place at your heavenly banquet. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the saving grace you freely give, both now and forever.

Amen.

A reflection for this twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Who Would Jesus Bless Today?

Many Bibles include a heading before the latter part of today's gospel reading (Mark 10:13-16) that says something like "Blessing the Children" or "Jesus Welcomes the Children." In reading such a heading, we might begin to imagine a sentimental scene in which Jesus is surrounded by cute, adorable children. When we think about children being blessed in our churches today, we might imagine children gathering around the altar or at the front of the worship space for a children's time, in which the pastor or worship leader would say a prayer with them and give them a blessing. The parents and others may also be gathered just behind the children, smiling in adoration of these young ones.

However, we cannot view the scene from Mark's gospel with only our modern understanding of the role and place of children in society. The life of many children in North America is one of relative privilege, with carefree days in which they often experience the care and love of grown-ups. Jesus, by bringing the children to him, identifies himself with those who were among the most vulnerable and helpless in society. In ancient times, children often were treated like property. They had few protections from those who would treat them badly. But Jesus came into the world for ones such as these children. Who, in our communities, is in the place of the children of ancient times? As Christ's church, do we provide a place of welcome and care for the most vulnerable and weak in our society?



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