

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST—PROPER 18

September 6, 2020 – 9:30 a.m.

PRELUDE “This Is My Father’s World” setting by Ruth Mackie, setting by Mark Sedio
Words from *LBW* 554, written by Malthie D. Babcock (1858-1901), for meditation:

1. This is my Father’s world, and to my list’ning ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father’s world; I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.

2. This is my Father’s world; the birds their carols raise;
The morning light, the lily white,
Demand their maker’s praise.
This is my Father’s world; He shines in all that’s fair.
In the rustling grass I hear him pass;
He speaks to me ev’rywhere.

3. This is my Father’s world; oh, let me not forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father’s world; why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is king, let the heavens ring;
God reigns, let the earth be glad!

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Pastor: Our help is in the name of the Lord,

People: who made heaven and earth.

Pastor: If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

People: But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.

Pastor: Since we are gathered to hear God’s Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

People: Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Pastor: Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

SALUTATION AND COLLECT OF THE DAY

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: O God, from whom all good proceeds, grant to us, Your humble servants, Your holy inspiration, that we may set our minds on the things that are right and, by Your merciful guiding, accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

FIRST READING *Ezekiel 33:7–9*

“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.”

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

EPISTLE *Romans 13:1–10*

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

HOLY GOSPEL *Matthew 18:1–20*

Pastor: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the eighteenth chapter.

People: Glory to You, O Lord.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man came to save the lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if

he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to You, O Christ.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

SERMON

“Look-up!” It is a short phrase, but an important one. It is a phrase that demands attention and focus. It is a phrase that draws your eyes and places them on someone or something. It is a call to attention and alertness. “Look-up!” We hear this quite commonly in our lives. We can hear this during a dazzling fireworks show, when a child directs our attention to the colorful explosion in the sky. It can be said when you are walking through a park with a friend and they point out an eagle perched in a towering tree. It might have been yelled at you in gym class when an errant ball was heading your way, or, perhaps, you might have said that to someone that you were talking with as they were looking at their phone and not paying attention. “Look-up!” Regardless of the context, it is a phrase that demands attention and focus. It draws your eyes to a person or thing. “Who is the greatest?” This question follows the same vein. It is a question that demands attention and focus. It turns it inward.

As the disciples bicker back and forth about this question, they each draw attention to their own power, position, and prestige. They make their case for greatness and say, “Look-up! Look at me!” This morning, they ask Jesus to settle their age-old debate, “Who is the greatest?” What will Jesus say? How will He answer? Who is it? Where will He direct them to look? What is His standard? We’ll find out.

Let’s first get some context, though. Just a few verses prior, Jesus gives His second passion prediction. Interestingly, in Matthew’s Gospel, this pattern *always* occurs when Jesus predicts His death and resurrection. It is prediction, misunderstanding, and correction. Jesus makes His prediction, the disciples have a misunderstanding about it, and Jesus corrects them. We saw that last week as Jesus rebukes Peter and tells the disciples what it means to follow Him. It is on the heels of this prediction that the disciples ask their question. “**At that time,**” that is, right after this, “**the disciples came to Jesus saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?’**”

In other words, “Look-up! Who is the greatest disciple?” This is a question that they ask Jesus *three times on three different occasions* in the Gospels. Perhaps the most disturbing incident would have to be on Maundy Thursday after Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper and washes His disciples’ feet. After such a beautiful gift and act of service, they begin arguing *who is the greatest?* One sometimes cannot help but wonder if He picked the 12 dullest guys in Israel who had no social cues.

But, hearing that Jesus was going to die, and knowing that He would establish His Kingdom, they wondered who the greatest disciple could be. Was it Peter? He did find the fish with the coin that paid the temple tax. He walked on water, and gave the confession that the Church is built on. He is the head and spokesmen of the disciples, *but* seems to have just as many gaffes as successes.

Might it be James or John? They are part of that “inner three” with Peter. They saw the Transfiguration and raising of Jairus’ daughter. Their mother in chapter 20 feels comfortable asking Jesus if they could sit at His right and left hand. John is even called the “Beloved disciple” and “the one whom Jesus loved.” Maybe a dark horse candidate would be Andrew; had he not told Peter about Jesus, think about how different things

would be! Maybe Matthew? He wrote the Church's first and most popular Gospel! The disciples wanted to know the answer. They needed to know. Surely Jesus knows and would tell them. Who is the greatest among them? Who is over all? Who has the most power and authority? Who has the most clout? **"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'"** "Who is the greatest?"

We ask that same question, today, don't we? Matthew 18:1 is today's question of success, power, and glory. Who is successful? Who has more power? Who gets the spotlight and credit? Who comes in first? Our world is obsessed with this, and it starts young. Kids today are often pushed from childhood to get up front and succeed. You see that at school with the focus on academics, and the fear of doing well on the ACT, or getting into college. You see it in children's sports, too. I remember coaching my first ever game of soccer and getting blown out 8-1 by the worst team. The Athletic director was not happy, and wanted to meet with me. I remember thinking to myself, "It's just a game and grade school soccer!"

But this greatness mentality permeates the work world, too. We are encouraged to do self-promotion, self-justification, and self-advocacy to get ahead. We can get engaged in a power struggle, or battle of the wills at the office.

It even permeates how we can see ourselves, and live. We are encouraged to be self-sufficient and dependent. Being anything but that can be seen as weak, or powerless. We live in a world, too, where things are earned, not given. You want it- whatever it is- you got to earn it! This is the world we live in. We can be consumed and conditioned to this thinking and way. This is how our world operates. But, this quest and tendency for greatness will disappoint. Every idol we allow to shape our lives, even this one, will disappoint.

There was an interview of NFL Quarterback Tom Brady a few years ago that illustrates this well. Even with all his greatness as an athlete, he still wasn't fully satisfied. At one point in the interview, Brady said, "Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? There's gotta be more than this." The interviewer then asked, "What's the answer?" Brady responded, "I wish I knew. I wish I knew." There is something more than the idol and pursuit of greatness. It begins with becoming like a child. "Look-up?" No, look-down!

Jesus answers their question, but won't give the answer that they, or us, want. Jesus' answer is so shocking and counter-cultural, that He skips using a parable, and makes His answer as direct and concrete as He can be. He uses an object lesson. **"And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'"** Their concern for status isn't compatible with God's scales of values, and true discipleship requires eradication of this human tendency.

Jesus says, "become like children." But that is hard in an adult world. Children are dependent on others; they aren't self-sufficient. Their lives are in the control of others; they don't call the shots. They must trust and depend on their parents for care and help. They need everything but have nothing; they cannot contribute. These aren't the marks or qualities of greatness! Far from it. To be dependent, powerless, lowly, vulnerable? Not at all. Jesus says, "look-down." One theologian helpfully says, "[This is] one of those great reversals: those looking up the ladder to see how great they can become are challenged to look down and see how little they must become. The power and the glory belong to God, not to us. The Lord must increase; we must decrease. The look down to a child is meant to shrink our egos, and put us in right alignment with the Lord." He is right. Seeing ourselves as children helps us to see who and what we really are.

To be a child is to see ourselves as totally dependent on God; both in things physical and spiritual. It is to see our lives in His control and protective care; who are we kidding, we really aren't in control. It is to trust Him for our needs; He is the One Who provides. It is to need *everything* but have *nothing*. It is only to those who realize that they spiritually have nothing, that God offers *everything*.

It is as if God says, "Look to me. Look to me when you are healthy or sick, wealthy or poor....Look to me. I am your joy and sorrow. I am your hope and healing. I am not some distant deity far in the sky. I am your Father, your Dad, the One Who loves you personally and intimately. You are my son, my daughter, my beloved!" He is the One Who gives strength and meaning, hope and health, mercy and grace, freely in Christ and because of Christ. God calls us to become like children. He wants us to see that we have nothing, so that He can give us *everything*. He invites us to a different way of thinking and living. Greatness consists not in looking up, but looking down, and seeing who we are and what we have in Jesus.

But, keep looking down. Do you see Him? You will. Do you see Jesus? Do you see Him wrapped in human flesh and laid in a manger? Do you see Him weighed down by our sin and shame? Do you see Him spit upon, mocked, and beaten? As Paul beautifully says in Philippians 2: “**And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**” Do you see Him crucified for you? Look-down. But, look-up! Do you see Jesus risen for you? Do you see Him standing victorious, standing victorious over sin, death, and the grave? Do you see Him ascended into Heaven and enthroned over all, ruling for the benefit of the Church? We are to look down, but we cannot forget to look-up!

But, keeping looking up; Jesus keeps our attention there for a little longer. If Jesus has us and His disciples look down to a child for the greatness of the Kingdom, He also has us *look up* to their angels. In verse 10, He says, “**See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in Heaven their angels always see the face of my Father Who is in Heaven.**” His point is that the we shouldn’t be deceived by their apparent “littleness.” These “little ones,” and us, have attending them mighty angels. As Scripture reminds us, God’s angels are often sent to guard and protect God’s people, and to serve them. Considering their angels, Jesus is saying that God’s little ones have a greatness beyond what the eye can see. Jesus triumphs over the disciples’ and our desire for power and glory by pointing us to a child and their angels. Look-up? No, look-down, then look-up. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Pastor: Lord, in Your mercy,

People: hear our prayer.

MUSIC DURING PREPARATION “My Faith Looks Trustingly” setting by Mark Sedio, Charles Callahan.

Words for meditation by Ray Palmer, 1808-1887:

1. My faith looks trustingly

To Christ of Calvary,

My Savior true!

Lord, hear me while I pray,

Take all my guilt away,

Strengthen in ev’ry way

My love for you!

3. While life’s dark maze I tread

And griefs around me spread,

Oh, be my guide;

Make darkness turn to day,

Wipe sorrow’s tears away,

Nor let me ever stray

From you aside.

PREFACE

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

Pastor: It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, for the countless blessings You so freely bestow on us and all creation. Above all, we give thanks for Your boundless love shown to us when You sent Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into our flesh and laid on Him our sin, giving Him into death that we might not die eternally. Because He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity, all who believe in Him will overcome sin and death and will rise again to new life. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

SANCTUS

People: Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth adored;

Heav’n and earth with full acclaim shout the glory of Your name.

Sing hosanna in the highest, sing hosanna to the Lord;

Truly blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Pastor: Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of all creation, for You have had mercy on us and given Your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

In Your righteous judgment You condemned the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit, and You justly barred them and all their children from the tree of life. Yet, in Your great mercy, You promised salvation by a second Adam, Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and made His cross a life-giving tree for all who trust in Him.

We give You thanks for the redemption You have prepared for us through Jesus Christ. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may faithfully eat and drink of the fruits of His cross and receive the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation that come to us in His body and blood.

Hear us as we pray in His name and as He has taught us:

LORD'S PRAYER

People: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

Pastor: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My T body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My T blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

PAX DOMINI

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

People: Amen.

DISTRIBUTION

You are invited to receive the Lord's Supper if you believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Savior from sin, you are a baptized child of the Triune God, and you believe that He gives you His body and blood in the bread and wine you receive. White grape juice can be found in the center of each tray for those who cannot receive alcohol. Children are welcome to come forward for a blessing.

Music during Distribution: "The King of Love My Shepherd Is" setting by Robert Hobby

POST-COMMUNION COLLECT

Pastor: Let us pray. We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

LUTHER'S MORNING PRAYER

People: I thank you, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

BENEDICAMUS

Pastor: Let us bless the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTION

Pastor: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

People: Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

POSTLUDE “Shepherd of Tender Youth” *LSB* 864

1. Shepherd of tender youth,
Guiding in love and truth
Through devious ways;
Christ, our triumphant king,
We come Your name to sing
And here our children bring
To join Your praise.

2. You are the holy Lord,
O all-subduing Word,
Healer of strife.
Yourself You did abase
That from sin's deep disgrace
You so might save our race
And give us life.

3. You are the great High Priest;
You have prepared the feast
Of holy love;
And in our mortal pain
None calls on You in vain;
Our plea do not disdain;
Help from above.

4. O ever be our guide,
Our shepherd, and our pride,
Our staff and song.
Jesus, O Christ of God,
By Your enduring Word
Lead us where You have trod;
Make our faith strong.

5. So now, and till we die,
Sound we Your praises high
And joyful sing:
Infants and all the throng,
Who to the Church belong,
Unite to swell the song
To Christ, our king!

Acknowledgments

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

GENEROSITY THOUGHTS: *Matthew 18:4 – “(Jesus said), ‘Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”* What does it mean to have childlike faith? Certainly, Jesus does not want us to have a faith that is childish. We are not called to ignorance or silliness. Rather, we are called to trust the way a child trusts – with complete confidence in the Father. We show that confidence in our lives when we follow His directives for our life. Father knows best, so we’ll take His advice!

THANK YOU to those who have sewn face masks for Lutheran World Relief. The masks will be taken to the LWF warehouse by September 15th so masks that you have made should be dropped off at Emmaus by September 13th. The kits for mask making will be available at Emmaus on an ongoing basis for future sewing. Thank you for your time and efforts for this project.

MISSING YOUR FRIENDS? Come join us Thursday evenings in the parking lot and reconnect with Emmaus members face to face. Bring a lawn chair, yourself, a beverage and reconnect. The gathering will start at **6:30 pm** but you are welcome to come when you are able. This event will happen through the month of September.

HEAR “THE LUTHERAN HOUR” on Sunday mornings at 6:05 a.m. on WCCO 830 AM radio. Next week’s broadcast: “Fireplace Spirituality” Speaker: Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler. Our relationship with God is not something to “set and forget” like a thermostat. (Acts 2:37-47)