

Reading: Mark 9:33-37 (NT page 1013)

Background to the reading

In Jesus' day the society were strictly divided in two classes, those who had honor and those who were in shame. And unfortunately you could lose your honor but never your shame! You could acquire honor by being born into noble families, by your profession and the way you conducted yourself at the Marketplace and on the streets. If you didnae conduct yourself in a appropriate manner you could bring shame over your whole family. Certain professions were considered as being shameful such as those who worked with the skins of dead animals.

So the disciples were most probably referring to these categories and how important it was to be in the right company

and not to compromise your “honorable” position in any way.

Amazingly although they did nae tell Jesus about their conversation, He already knew the content of their discussion. And He puts their argument in the right spiritual context. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” By sitting down Jesus is implying that He is the rabbi and He is going to teach them something very important which He does.

And then to be more specific Jesus take a young child into his arms and explains what He meant with his words. A child in that society did nae have any power/status/importance *per se* and was solely dependent on their parents. It was only after a son have matured into an adult that he “meant something”. By taking a child Jesus is emphasizing the fact that

although a child is powerless in their society, in God's eyes the opposite is true. And the Jesus goes on saying that the children will be representing Him and God the Father in this world. In Jewish custom, a person's agent, similar to a modern business representative, could act on behalf of the person who sent him. He had the support and the full authority of the sender. This principle was also applied in the Old Testament to God's messengers like his prophets.

So what is the message: God look at his children with different eyes and the most important in this world is those who serve others!

Amen

“Youth church” contemporary lesson

I guess you know that to be “last” in everything especially when we are with our friends is not the coolest thing. However Jesus is saying to us that

in the eyes of God the most important is the one that is a servant to others. Being last is not such a bad thing. Because in His kingdom there are other different values. The last will be first and everyone will be together in peace and harmony.

Jesus is telling us not to worry too much about the values of this world when it comes to things like who is the most important. He came to earth for everyone, for you and me. You and me are important in His eyes. He took away all our sins just because he loves us.

Therefore must we never ever doubt ourselves or think that we are not important and that we cannae make a difference.

You and I can make a difference and let us start by hlping others, serving the needy and loking after those who are being bullied by our society!

Amen

Song **Let the weak say I am strong**

Sermon

The text verses for the sermon are:

36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

When I read this text I immediately recognized the cultural differences that exists between the values and norms in the society of Jesus and our Scottish society. The values in the society of Jesus is pretty close to the African value system that I grew up with. There no one would dare to harm a child and when someone do harm children they are severely punished. It is one thing that is not tolerated. In the context of Jesus, children would have been protected by the adults and the families around them. Although they did nae have any power at all, they were well behaved and would nae dare to demand any powers and rights. They were learned from an early

stage to respect God and the neighbor, to recite the Old Testament passages and to know the law of God.

So in the context of Jesus, it would have been perfectly normal for him to take a “stranger’s” child in his arms.

In the Scottish society we know how different it is. Children have to be protected by society usually and sadly against their own family members or friends. In some cases the parents are not competent to learn their children any values at all, not even anything about God as it is known to us through the Bible.

So in our society Jesus’ ways would have been scrutinized and criticized. People would have expected Him – rightly so – to be disclosure checked.

I wondered how many of you watched the BBC 2 programme on the telly called “Reverse missionaries”.

It is about an African pastor from Blantyre in Malawi who comes to the birthplace of David Livingstone in Blantyre Scotland to see the effects of secularization on our youth and to discover how missionaries is now needed to come here and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people especially our children. The mission field has indeed been shifted – it is no longer far away in other countries. It is here, all around us, and sadly the harvest is standing on our fields rotting away because the workers are so few.

We do not need anyone to tell us what is wrong. We all know what is wrong. We have become a society that is scared of our own children and youth, to scared even to whisper the name of Jesus. We have become people that is so polite that we

totally ignore our faith when we hang out with friends, just so that we do not offend anyone whilst offending the Almighty God.

I think our text is challenging us in a big way to take responsibility again of and for our children. I want to challenge you this morning to go home and to phone your children telling them that the Lord has spoken to you and that you want to share with them the importance that they start reading their Bibles and pray. And to those who still have children in your houses do not start any meal without giving thanks to God – even if you are eating out! Let us all start laying down the foundations of a Christian society where nothing begins without praying.

The mission field is in our houses, in our Parishes, in our schools in our meeting rooms and in our friendship circles. If we start focusing on the Christian behavior of

our children, we will have a Christian society again with proper values such as respect for God, for oneself and others! If we take responsibility again, we will see the changes and inherit the kingdom of God.

A writer in South Africa once said:” God will forgive us all things except the things that we do to our children, in this case of not telling them enough about God and allowing them to have “rights” when it comes to faith. If we want to serve God, we have to adhere to His call namely to raise our children to have respect for God and other people.

May God help us to go out and start to bring the harvest in! Amen