

Luke in Your Neighbourhood 9
Greatest in the Kingdom?

Luke 9: 46-50, 18:15-17

Arguments in Churches, especially a perfect one like St Andrews, surely not! So Luke tells us again that following Jesus is not ever going to be easy!! If nothing else you are suddenly wed to a bunch of sinners, works in progress, who will let you down and mess up. You may mistakenly think you are perfect, but they know they are not!

So we are taken into the scene of this private leadership row: yes you have guessed it: about who is the most important!! Pride comes before a fall: the greater the pride the bigger the fall!! And make no mistake about it: Pride is Sin!!

Jesus immediately sees what is happening with the help of the Holy Spirit gift of discernment, and intervenes big time. He takes a little child with him right into the middle of the arguing disciples. Then He says: Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all - he is the greatest! As ever it's the Upside Down Kingdom or maybe just maybe the Lord is offering us another perspective on what is really the right way up, to live in community with one another. Now we pride ourselves on our welcome at St Andrews but I still think it has much room for improvement: how are we at welcoming children for instance? Do we really welcome them, do we get down to their height or level rather than expecting them to come up to ours. Often when you play with a child you need to be on the floor, laying or kneeling with them: it's a humbling yet hugely rewarding experience as we enter their world and see things in their black and white simple way.

Of course getting down to the same physical level as a child does not mean that we have to behave as if we are children! Paul was to say later in 1 Corinthians 13:9 "When I was a child I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became

a man, I put childish things behind me." So here's a challenge to each one of us... What do I need to put behind me? Petty squabbles "She said this to me so ..."

Disagreements "He took this from me so ..." Fights physical or mental "He hit me so ... or she thinks this about me so..."

"I not going to say sorry until" Or just the look of disapproval cause we are so holy! Now you might be thinking that these things sound like statements from a school playground and you're right they could be. But sadly they are also found in the adult realm maybe in a more subtle way and can be shown in an unkind look or expression, our bad attitude, unthoughtful words or unkind actions. I am sure each of us might be able to say guilty as charged to some of these things! I think that God is saying to us today to grow up and put these things behind us and obviously this will require change. Maybe you will need to ask God's forgiveness or the forgiveness of the other person so that we can get to the place of open relationship with God that He demonstrated when he put a child in the midst. So instead of childish ways, let us exhibit childlike enthusiasms as we encourage each other on with our words, with our actions and with our love!

Now I should imagine that the disciples by this point were squirming which is probably why they tried to change the subject, move the focus off them, and invite Jesus to turn his criticism on another! We tend to do that when we know we are in the wrong don't we!!

Master we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us: Don't stop him said Jesus for whoever is not against you is for you. The attempt to deflect Jesus backfires. Just as the child in their midst is of equal importance, so are the nameless ones who don't have club membership of the disciples team yet are still doing God's work. How many Church rules are written more out of desire to protect our vested interest than in any sense to protect God's work: answer most of them.

Now I believe the Lord wants St Andrews to truly be an intergenerational family. We have a long way to go on that one but we have made a start. The Contemporary Church needs to provide people with a visual aid of how the Lord of heaven and earth wants His children (of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, and so on) to live in harmony with one another: How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity: for there the Lord commands His blessing (Psalm 133). Not an impossible dream but an increasing reality when the Holy Spirit fashions the People of God into the Big Family of God. The Bible calls us the Children of God and I love that description because it emphasizes God's fatherhood and clearly states that there is no family hierarchy in the Kingdom. Now that's the point of Jesus' visual challenge in our reading to the disciples: so lets not just pay lip service to everyone in the Body having a unique part to play, lets live it out in a radical counter cultural way!!

Apply this to St Andrews and we have a challenge before us: our biggest mission-field by far at present are our children and young people and the Lord has put them in our midst:

Sonbeams, Young Church & Kidz Klub mean weekly contact with some 70 children and their families, and Urban Saints, KYB, & Oasis Church means potential weekly contact with around 40 young people. The Lord has put in our midst these precious young lives: His word to us this morning is to embrace them not to the exclusion of others but with equal time and resource as others. Could the Lord be speaking to you about this? Is this an area of service and ministry you could make a contribution to? If so please speak to me or anyone already working in these key areas.

So let's jump if you don't mind to another story about little children: Luke, ever the artist, is building up his picture with colour after colour, layer after layer of paint, until he draws the eye towards the great scene he has in mind when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. Children should be seen and not heard

was the attitude of the disciples, maybe still smarting from the rebuke we have just looked at but Jesus sees it not only differently but radically so. Luke first emphasizes how young the children were that people were bringing to Jesus. The Disciples, like bouncers, try and stop them but Jesus not only welcomes them, but in Mark's version embraces and blesses them. He also takes the opportunity to teach a key principle that we all need to learn and relearn. These children are the ones, Jesus says, who most truly show us what it means to accept and enter God's Kingdom. There is something about the helplessness of children, and their complete trust of those who love and care for them, which perfectly demonstrates the humble trust he has been speaking of on so many occasions. Jesus doesn't offer a romantic or sentimental view of children; he must have known, in the daily life of a village, and through growing up as the oldest of several children, just how demanding and annoying they can be. But he sees to the heart of what it means to receive God's kingdom; it is like drinking in one's mother's milk, like learning to see - and to smile! - by looking at one's mother's eyes and face and the stark contrast Jesus gives is the rich young ruler which comes next in Luke's narrative.

Here again is food for the St Andrews journey: Are we letting children come to Jesus? Don't you think that those children held in the arms of Jesus remembered that for the rest of their lives? So often, for fear of claims of indoctrination and sometimes because we are unsure of our relationship with the Lord, we as parents and as Church tell our children and young people about Christ (the stories, the facts) but don't encourage them to consider a relational commitment to Him as Saviour and Lord. Yet Jesus here specifically encourages us to have a childlike (not childish) relationship with Him. Children not only can have a dynamic relationship with God through Christ but also can bring to the whole Church a divine spark,

which can profoundly deepen the lives of adults (mention Australia children and Bethany).

Once when in Hastings when Lydia was about five or six years old and we had a terraced walled back garden: she was stood on the wall and as I came towards her (still some 10 feet away) she launched herself into mid-air for me to catch her. No notice of her world record attempt at leaping just an assumption that I would catch her and thank God I did: just!! She reasoned that I loved her and would therefore not let her come to harm and her 'faith' in me was not misplaced. Childlike faith is like that and I need more of it: perhaps you do too!! We have the most amazing missionary opportunity right in our midst: it will no doubt be a humbling experience as we respond to this challenge but what can be more important than birthing a new generation for Christ today. Indeed by welcoming each child and young person we will be welcoming the Lord himself in our midst.

Speak out 1 John 3:1 over congregation.

Pastor David

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