

Sermon 2008 Pentecost 17

Text: Matthew 18: 1-20

Theme: "What's Important?"

Today is the beginning of our Stewardship Emphasis. Each year, we set aside three Sundays to talk about our faithful response to God's gifts and we finish the three weeks by celebrating Commitment Sunday. On Commitment Sunday, which is September 21<sup>st</sup> this year, we will all bring forward our written promises of our faithful gifts to God for the coming year. Remember that no one sees those promises except you and God. The purpose of the writing it down and bringing it forward is to allow each of us to concretely express our faithfulness and gratefulness to God for his many gifts.

I usually stick with the texts appointed for the day when we have a stewardship emphasis, trusting the Holy Spirit to provide what we need to hear. And would you look at the strange conglomeration we have for the Gospel this week? At first glance, one might think that someone just threw together a bunch of things that he had overheard the Lord say at some point but didn't know where else to work it in.

First we have the disciples arguing about who is the greatest. How ridiculous is that? But how much time have we wasted trying to

determine who is number one and who is number two? Who won and who lost? Who was right and who was wrong? Jesus picks up a little powerless child and says, act like a child. A little child is powerless, dependent, defenseless and so much more on the same page with God.

What gets us off God's page? Sin. So Jesus says if anything causes you to sin cut it off. A bit drastic to be sure but Jesus wants it crystal clear for us. If that summer cabin keeps us away from worship – sell it. If that sport gets in the way of following him – quit it. If that fabulous person with whom we are completely infatuated demeans us and mocks our faith in Christ, walk away. Whatever or whoever it is, if it gets us off the same page as God it is better to be without it than to be without faith.

Then Jesus launches into leaving the 99 sheep to seek the lost one. A child would be called irresponsible for leaving the flock to seek that one that is lost. What's one sheep compared to a whole flock? But to a child, one animal that he loves is all important. The others are safe and that one is in trouble – end of discussion. Go after the one in trouble.

Finally Jesus gets to the meat of the matter. If your brother sins against you...If your brother sins against you, go tell everyone you know, get them on your side and make sure that your brother gets punished right? See? Here is where all this child like faith get's tough. Our nature says be first, be best, be right and the Lord says that none of that matters. Sin has bent our priorities so badly that we will lose a relationship rather than be wronged. Pay attention to that ladies and gentleman, boys and girls. There are people here right now who had rather lose the most precious thing on earth, a relationship with another human being rather than be wronged. Being right is ALL IMPORTANT. Sin has bent our priorities something fierce.

I so wish I could have back the many things and many people I have thrown away for worldly reasons. I so wish that I would have listened to the Lord years and years ago before I sacrificed so much only to find that IT DOESN'T MATTER. Listen to what you gripe about. Oooo he likes her better than me. Oh there's a stain on the carpet and a dirty pan in the sink. Eeww he ignored me and didn't even say hello. DROP IT! Stop acting like adults and start acting more like children!

That's right. That's what I said. Start acting more like children. Do you know why I love youth ministry? Because adults drive me nuts! Kids are transparent and honest with me. They sin boldly and they love Grace. Give a kid grace and he acts like...well he acts like a kid. Give an adult grace and you get an argument. The Lord has given us all grace. We are the lost sheep. We are the one who offended and while we are arguing about who is the most lost and the most offensive, the Lord says, STOP IT! Come here you bunch of ninnyes and he pulls us onto his lap and holds us.

That, my friends, is the theology of the cross. As we are sitting on the Lord's lap and looking back into our lives we see so much that we insisted was crucial, so much pride, so much greed and that is the theology of glory that so pervades our sinful nature. When we are sitting on the Lord's lap with his arms around us we begin to understand what it is to give yourself to the Lord. There you will find complete peace and joy but it will cost you your theology of glory.

There is a story about a seller who had a beautiful pearl, just an exquisite pearl. Someone came along and said,

"I want to buy that pearl; I've got to have it." If you could have

seen this pearl, you would say the same thing. "How much is it?" he asked.

The seller responded, "Well, how much do you have?"

He answered, "Well, not a whole lot. Will I be able to afford it?"

"Everyone can afford it," replied the seller. "How much do you have?"

"Well, I've got \$10,000 in the bank. Is that enough?"

"What else do you have?"

The man reached in his pocket. "Oh, you mean like in my wallet. Okay, in my wallet I have \$120."

"Fine. I'll take it. What else do you have?"

"That's it."

"Well, where do you live?"

"Oh, in my house."

"Great. I'll take your house."

"My house, too?" Does that mean I'll have to live in my camper?"

"Oh, you have a camper!"

"Yeah."

"Good. I'll take it, too."

"That means I'll have to sleep in my car."

"Oh, you have a car?"

"Well, actually, I have two."

"I'll take them both."

"Well, that's it. I don't have anything else."

The seller asked, "Are you alone in this world?"

"No," replied the man, "I have a lovely wife and three children."

"I'll take them."

"Well, now I am left alone."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," the seller exclaimed, "I want you too!

You belong to me. Everything that you have belongs to me. It's all mine, but, don't worry, I'm going to give you this exquisite pearl and still let you use everything else. Any time I see you have need any of it, I will make it available to you."

That's the theology of the cross. You and I sit in God's lap like his little children. We have been given EVERYTHING. That's why the psalmist in the introit is calling for us to rejoice today, giving thanks and singing praises to God's name. We already have everything that is good and important and if we don't have it, it's neither good nor

important.

So, today we begin our stewardship program "Ten for Ten." We challenge you to return 10% of whatever God gives you. If you already give 10%, then we challenge you to give more. If you can't bring yourself to let go of 10%, that's okay, it takes time sitting on God's lap before you really trust like a child, really trust that he will take care of you – that he has already taken care of whatever your needs were before you even knew you needed them. Just figure out what percentage you are giving and give a higher percentage for 10 weeks.

This is your opportunity to act like a child. Don't be fiscally responsible, feeding your IRA first and God second or third...or last. Don't believe that a fancy car or fancy clothes or expensive dinners or fine wine will fill that hole inside you. Give that money to God. He is where that hole gets filled. Act like a child for ten weeks. Just blindly trust God and crawl into his lap and give him what you don't think you have and thumb your nose at the world. Quit trying to act so grown up and act like who you really are. Act like a child. AMEN.