

The Gift of God for the People of God Psalm 8; Hebrews 1: 1-4, 2: 5-12;  
Mark 10: 13-16

A student was given an assignment to write out instructions for making a paper airplane. After about an hour and a half of intense work, here is what he came up with: “This is how to make a paper airplane. It’s very easy to do. The only thing you need is a piece of paper. Place the piece of paper vertically and make a vertical crease down the middle. Take the upper left corner and position it on the crease. The top edge must be lined up with the crease. Press the fold flat. Do the same with the upper right corner, lining it up with the crease and pressing the fold flat. Place the paper horizontally with the center fold toward you. Fold the top edge down two inches to form the wing. Turn the paper over and repeat the last step to form the other wing. Hold the paper airplane by the center fold and pull the wings up to a 90 degree angle to the body.”

Now, if you have never made a paper airplane and can do so by following those verbal instructions, you have my congratulations. But every kid- and probably many of us know how to make a paper airplane. How did we learn to do it? It likely wasn’t from someone telling us, it was from someone showing us how.

The Old Testament contains 39 books with over 602,000 words and 638 commandments. All that was to tell us how to gain victory over sin and suffering. But it didn’t work. The last word in the Old Testament is “curse.” After all those hundreds of thousands of words, the world was still in slavery to sin and suffering. So, God said, “Let me show you,” and God sent Jesus Christ.

On this first Sunday of October, we are celebrating World Communion Sunday. It is a time when we reflect on the unity of all believers through the remembrance of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us. However, this very meal Christ intended to unite the church can cause division and misunderstanding. In reality, division happens when it is not the celebration of the sacrament itself, but the attempts made to find ONE form of serving the sacrament that will satisfy all individual personal comfort levels- that is when division and misunderstanding occurs. When we most love the concentration on how the sacrament itself is done- then we forget that Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper with instructions to continue its celebration as a reminder of God’s great love and Christ’s great sacrifice which proves the depth of God’s love. As we physically “come to the table” this morning, may our hearts and minds concentrate on Christ’s sacrifice for us and may we be filled with gratitude for this great gift.

The Epistle to the Hebrews and our Hebrews text begin with the reminder that states: “long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son.” The writer affirms that it is God who has spoken. While

revelation itself may take many and various forms, it is still God who is the one doing the speaking through the prophets. The writer makes clear -and I quote- that the, “Son...is heir of all things...He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being...When He made purification for sins (Christ’s atoning work on the cross), He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” This confession stands at the beginning of the Book of Hebrews so that the author can clearly clarify exactly who Christ is.

The Hebrews reading then jumps to chapter 2: 5-12. In the end words of verse 5 through verse 8 in this second chapter, we find a quote from Psalm 8: 4-6. The point seems to be that creation and the world yet to come are for the sake of humans. The HOWEVER comes at the end of verse 8, where it states, “As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them...but we do see Jesus...” Christ suffered death because He completely identified with humanity for whom death is inevitable.

The last few verses of our Hebrews text serve to establish the priestly role of Christ. The priestly work of Christ rests in both the relationship to God the Creator and in relationship to the children of God. In sharing our humanity, Christ is able and willing to call us brothers and sisters. It is in awe that we attempt to comprehend the words, “For the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason, Jesus is not ashamed to call them sisters and brothers.” This belief alone could/should support us in keeping our faith strong.

In the scripture reading from the Gospel of Mark we find the familiar account of Jesus’ interaction with children. Typical of how the disciples are portrayed in Mark, here they bumble and speak “sternly” to the parents who were hoping to have their children touched by Jesus. The Lord’s response is described in equally emotional and strong terms. He was “indignant” with the disciples, presumably for their lack of hospitality and grace.

Jesus says, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” But the saying must not be enough. For Jesus then offers more than His words; He also includes action. His pronouncement is, “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” But the pronouncement not only comes requiring the action of embracing a child or those considered “small”, but also must come with the attitude of humility and complete trust.

The action of Jesus (taking the children in His arms, laying hands on them and blessing them) bears some resemblance to the sacramental action of taking, breaking and blessing the elements of the Lord’s Supper. The threefold action reminds us that Jesus Himself symbolizes

the invisible grace of God. The church does well to pause and remember the image of Jesus with a group of children in His arms- the love and acceptance on Jesus' face but also the joy with which the children respond.

The challenge that comes with these New Testament texts is the link between who Jesus is and what Jesus does. The Hebrews text goes to great length to establish the divinity of Christ. In the Mark text we find Jesus visibly showing, through His actions, the grace of God.

The joy of World Communion Sunday comes in our encounter with both the person and the work of Christ at the heavenly banquet set before us. As a gift of God, we receive a taste of both who Christ is and what Christ does. The Lord's Supper liturgy affirms that in this meal Christ offers His body for us that we might be the body of Christ for the world. We share in the feast with others from around the world so that we might bear witness to Christ's life and ministry around the world. As we celebrate our unity with the faithful in every time and place, we go forth to be that same grace of God. A visible sign of the visible grace. The sacramental gift of the Lord's Supper. God's gift of Christ for us. The gifts of ministry in the church intended for the world.

We hear the words from God in this first chapter of Hebrews- these words stating Jesus is the heir of all things and the exact imprint of God. We hear the message that through Christ's becoming human like us, His suffering provides the availability of salvation to all those who are His brothers and sisters.

The message from Mark is to see in what Jesus does, an example for our lives. Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child cannot enter it. That means total and transparent trust such as young children are ready to show.

A father and his young son were hiking when they came to a deep ravine, bridged only by a swaying but sturdy rope bridge. The father walked across, expecting the child was right behind him. When he got to the other side, he turned and saw the child shaking in fear on the far side. The father urged the son to cross but the boy cried he was afraid of falling through the ropes. His father said, "Don't look down. Just look at me." Then the dad nodded his head in assurance and watched as his son, confidently and bravely, put one foot in front of the other, eyes focused on his father, crossed the bridge and walked straight into his father's arms.

To receive the kingdom of God as a child is to receive it as an unmerited gift and to receive it with eyes and hearts confidently focused on our Creator God. Jesus has through God's grace, made the unmerited gift available to us. The child becomes a metaphor for the little ones whom Jesus welcomes to His arms; the least, the outsiders, the poor, the exploited, the nobodies; and such as all of us.

As Hebrews reminds us, "We do not see everything in subjection....but we DO see Jesus." We have not seen the complete victory of the reign of God among us. But we do see Jesus. Sunday morning is not a time when we get together to put a happy face on everything. Rather, Sunday is a time to get and/or refocus our vision. We will not see and understand everything until we meet Christ in glory, but we can see evidence of God's grace through the actions of others. However, as little children we must have eyes and hearts open to see the Gift of God for the People of God. Amen

Let us now "come to the table" that is prepared for us.

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