

Pentecost 18B

September 23, 2018

Rev Ken Wratten at St Luke's

Jeremiah 11:18-20

James 3:13 – 4:3, 7-8a

Mark 9:30-37

'I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.'

Wisdom of the world vs heavenly wisdom

Disciples argue who was the greatest

When I was in my late twenties I was given the engineering assignment of project manager for a system that controlled the electric power distribution in and around Caracas, Venezuela. After the system was designed and tested in our facility in Pennsylvania, I was assigned to supervise the installation, and to train the operators in Caracas. For the first month or so I was put up in the Hotel Tamanaco, which is a beautiful hotel situated on a hillside, with a view that overlooks the sprawling city of Caracas. I remember standing on the balcony at the Tamanaco one evening with my software designer partner. I said; "Look at us. This feels like the top of the world. I think the sky is the limit. I feel like we can accomplish anything we want."

What I overlooked in my measurement of self-importance, was that I had now missed a month of our then infant daughter Candace growing up. After a few months on that project I had been away long enough that Ruthie had pretty well mastered running the household without me. There were a lot of those missed opportunities as I pursued my career advancement. There was some worldly, career path wisdom that guided my choices, but another form of wisdom – heavenly wisdom, was lacking. It took a lot of intentional focus for me to eventually earn my way into the heart of the family.

Saint Catherine of Siena wrote this message for implanting wisdom in the young: "Make two homes for thyself, my daughter. One actual home... and the other a spiritual home, which thou are to carry with thee always." How much attention do you and I give to our spiritual home; and is that home a place where we nurture the growth of spiritual wisdom?

In the Gospel lesson today, when Jesus' followers were arguing about who would be next to him on the org chart in heaven, he told them, "Whoever wants to be the first must be the last of all and servant of all." And then he took a little child, and put the child in front of them, and said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Jesus did not scold them, which is actually surprising. But he did make the point that while they were arguing about their self-worth, and their importance in the heavenly seating assignment, the position GOD would give them depends on a

completely different set of criteria than they were considering. Our being followers of Christ requires that we put the needs and welfare of the vulnerable and the powerless above what we want for ourselves. James says that is “wisdom from above”.

There are lots of examples of this down-to-earth servanthood that happen here all the time; ministry that does not show up in the Sunday bulletin:

Donating money to people we meet at store entrances and on the streets.

Donating time to important causes that help the homeless, or the lonely.

Making and sending cards      Calling and visiting housebound friends

Fixing things

THIS is what being a faith community is about; to serve each other, and create new ways to serve others outside this community. Like craft projects at Chamberlains, and stuffing weekend snack bags for hungry school children.

I was told as a child that I had a lot to learn; every adult knew a lot more than I did, and I should never assume that I have anything important to offer. I was taught low self esteem. That isn't what Jesus taught.

Jesus taught that every one of us is a child of God. This reality invites us into a humility that shows itself in lives of servanthood, empowering people who have no power, offering our love to people who may have never before experienced love.

So we are being given a challenge today to take good care of our spiritual home (the home we carry with us always), and to continually study and put into practice Jesus' lessons about spiritual wisdom and understanding. Jesus' brother James promises that the result is a life that is pure, gentle, peaceable, full of mercy, willing to yield, and filled with assurance of God's presence. I could use more of those things; I want those things in my life; I welcome you to join me in this life journey of faith; this alternate approach to life.

This is what it means to be the People of God. Amen.