

Pentecost 17 (Lectionary 25) Year B September 19, 2021
Mark 9:30-37
Epiphany, Winnipeg

As I speak, I know that there is child somewhere waiting to be born. The one who waits to bear that child is herself a child, not in age but a child of parent who themselves might still be thought of as children by their parents. That's OK. As we gather all over the place this morning there is someone somewhere – you or I might know such a one – who has spent decade after decade after decade living out their days and they are about to breathe their last breath and they were once a child too. And I guess they still are somebody's child. As I speak, somebody's child – hi mom and dad – stands up here saying, "As I speak," and so on and so on....

As we come together all over the place like we do, there are all these people – each one a child, you were once somebody's child, maybe you still are a child, just a few years old, or decades old, you're a child. You, I, we, we can't get away from that.

And Jesus 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 isn't being sentimental. First of all, he's talking about real children. He's talking about kids who don't have jobs or maybe don't have money and who don't make the decisions about how life around them unfolds. When he's talking about children he's talking about all the things that make childhood messy, and he's talking about kids who maybe can't understand their parents because sometimes it's hard to have parents even when you really love them or when they do a good job. He's not being sentimental. He's talking about real kids.

He's talking about people who won't vote tomorrow because they're too young, and he's talking about people who are on the board of the Bank of

Canada or the school board or on the council of Epiphany Lutheran Church. And although children can be adorable he's not just talking about adorable. He's talking about real children in the real world.

Or think about the children you might have heard of, even if you don't know them. Some born to privilege and wrapped in what we're told is the good life, stuck there through no fault of their own. Some born to poverty or a hand to mouth life even if they are surrounded by love or something else...through no fault of their own. Kids on migrant ships that drift to shores that may or may not be welcoming shores, or kids once whisked off to a school far away from mom and dad. Think about kids you might know in your own house, or on your block, with a new backpack or lunchbox and a fresh clean mask for a new day in a new year, or maybe without a new anything because there's no money for new this year.

And Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

He's not being sentimental.

Here's something you might or might not know – you will now! - that happens in the gospel of Mark. Three times Jesus says to his disciples that he will be handed over to the authorities, and he will suffer, and will die, and on the third day rise. Three times he says that. The first time he does his most famous disciple says "No way, that can't be!"

The third time Jesus talks about his own suffering and dying and rising, two other disciples come to him and say, "We want you to give us all the glory to share with you!" They don't get it.

And today, the second time he talks about his own suffering and dying and rising, his closest followers don't even notice that he said something because they're trying to figure out which one of them is the greatest. "Vote for me!"

Then Jesus takes a child, sits her down on the seat right next to him, and he says to his disciples, "Look. Your life is not about avoiding suffering or pretending it's not going to happen. Your life is not about being the greatest or biggest or richest or smartest, and it's not about being famous and having all the glory. Your life – and he's looking us right in the eye – is about welcoming the ones with the least power, or glory, or ease."

And Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

There's a child, someone's child, sitting in a pew here (even though it looks like the youngest child might be pushing fifty some day soon...). There are children gathered with us at home, a part of this all at a distance. We are, or were, all children.

Somebody's child, young or old, is vaccinated. Twice, maybe three times. Somebody's child is against the whole things, or somebody's child is born somewhere where they just can't get a vaccine. Somebody's child is in ICU getting sicker and sicker from a disease they still think is a hoax, and somebody's child looks after them and is so tired after twenty months that they can barely move.

Somebody's child has a sign on the lawn that says "Save our country!" and some other child of someone has a green sign with a message that's, well, a little more green. There's a child, a girl, in Afghanistan, being told now that she can't go to school any more, and somebody's boy child who is twenty or thirty or fifty or

sixty is the one giving her that news.

There's a child, always a child, somebody's child, each one of us and each one of them, somebody's child.

And Jesus 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 isn't being sentimental. Jesus is drawing us into a messy life where the most important thing is how we receive one another. It is not easy, and it doesn't mean we should just be nice. And sometimes somebody's child is clearly right and sometimes they're just plain wrong. But it's still all about how we welcome another child, even how we welcome someone we don't agree with or particularly like. And we are all somebody's child. Every last one.

But Jesus puts something fresh at the heart of our life together. When we welcome one another – now that we've established that we're all children – we are welcoming Jesus, and when we welcome Jesus we are welcoming the God who has breathed life into us and called us God's own. He is drawing us into a life where we are invited to see Jesus in the youngest of children and the oldest oldest oldest of children, in the ones we would expect and the ones we would not expect. And now life isn't about being right or wrong, better or more, most famous or honoured; it's about always living with this big promise that God present among us. Right here. In the child right next to you....

And one more twist. Jesus has entered into this messy life with us....a life so messy that even he will die for it...and he has taken on a life of receiving everyone who is a child, or who has been a child or who longs to be someone's child. And he steps out of a tomb into a new day where even now every child is received and welcomed; where we are received and welcomed by Jesus, by the one who sent him, right here, and right now. AMEN.