

September 19, 2021 – Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

### **Introduction to the Day**

Today we hear James warn against selfish ambition, while the disciples quarrel over which one of them is the greatest. Jesus tells them the way to be great is to serve. Then, to make it concrete, he puts in front of them a flesh-and-blood child. We are called to welcome the children God puts in front of us, to make room for them in daily interaction, and to give them a place of honor in the assembly.

### **Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God,  
whose teaching is life,  
whose presence is sure,  
and whose love is endless.

**Amen.**

Let us confess our sins to the one who welcomes us  
with an open heart.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

God our comforter:

**like lost sheep, we have gone astray.**

**We gaze upon abundance and see scarcity.**

**We turn our faces away from injustice and  
oppression.**

**We exploit the earth with our apathy and greed.**

**Free us from our sin, gracious God.**

**Listen when we call out to you for help.**

**Lead us by your love to love our neighbors as  
ourselves.**

**Amen.**

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

By the gift of grace in ☩ Christ Jesus, God makes  
you righteous.

Receive with glad hearts the forgiveness of all your  
sins.

**Amen.**

### **Gathering Song**

**“All Are Welcome”**

**Screen**

### **Prayer of the Day**

O God, our teacher and guide, you draw us to yourself and welcome us as beloved children. Help us to lay aside all envy and selfish ambition, that we may walk in your ways of wisdom and understanding as servants of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

### **Lesson: James 3:13—4:3, 7-8a**

<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup>For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.<sup>4:</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. <sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8a</sup>Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

### **Children's Message**

## Gospel – Mark 9:30-37

Jesus and the disciples went on] and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;<sup>31</sup> for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”<sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

<sup>33</sup> Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?”<sup>34</sup> But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup> He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”<sup>36</sup> Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

## Message “Think Differently”

Rev. Eric Nielsen

You may have heard the statistic which states that we as human beings only use about 10% of our brain power. About a decade ago the movie Limitless took this notation and ran with it, spinning a story about a writer who takes a secret experimental drug that allows him to use 100% of his mind. This causes him to be the perfect version of himself, incredibly attentive and creative. Everything he’s ever read or seen is instantly organized in his mind and available for him to draw upon. While he’s taking the pills, he’s such a radiant and appealing person that people are immediately drawn to him. He is able to grasp the details of complex business situations and outguesses the stock market, a skill he uses to great financial success. But, of course, there is a wrinkle – there is a limited supply of the drug, and there are lots of bad guys who want to get their hands on it, and will kill anyone else to get it. Obviously, this was cheap B-grade fiction. But the real problem with the movie is this – it turns out that we’re already using most of our brains. The old assertion that we are using only 10% is, in fact, a myth.[1] With PET scans and MRIs and other modern technology researchers have found that daily mental activity uses many areas of the brain, and over the course of a day, just about every part of our brain gets a workout.

The Eau Claire area is a center of education. We have a University and a Technical College, as well as many wonderful public and private schools. Those of us in the Reformation traditions historically have uplifted the role of education, establishing both congregations and colleges as our nation expanded westward. Yet while recognizing the value and importance of education, our reading today reveals that even if we are brain-smart, we all still do some really stupid things as we seek to follow Jesus. The Christians to whom James writes are in a somewhat schizophrenic situation. They claim possession of wisdom from above on the one hand, while on the other hand they display the fruits of wisdom from below which are shown in bitterness, selfish ambition, boastfulness and envy.

Perhaps nobody has shaped the technology of our world today more than Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple. Jobs’ mantra, which was incorporated into much of Apple’s early marketing, was the phrase *Think Differently*. Jobs knew that for Apple to succeed, the company had to have a kind of smarts that was unlike its other technology competitors. So rather than the monolithic, corporate IBM-style approach to technology, he sought to encourage his customers to tap into their own creativity. And so, look where we are today.

Think differently. That was the challenge of Jesus to his disciples as well. What does true greatness look like in the Kingdom of God. Is it about seats of honor and power, as the disciples appeared to believe, or was it to be found somewhere, and somehow, else? Jesus tells us that if we want to be first, we have to be last. If we

want to be great in God's eyes, we have to be servants in the eyes of those around us. In this regard, I have always been amazed at the story of former President Jimmy Carter. Of course, history has yet to write its final evaluation; but most today look at the Carter Administration as one of the weaker and ineffectual ones of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet Jimmy Carter has been a great past-President. President Carter could be enjoying his retirement – playing golf, riding horses, and those kinds of things. After all, he turns 97 in less than 2 weeks. Instead, having survived both liver and brain cancer, and several publicized falls and broken bones, Carter continues to be a voice of Christian discipleship. Whether swinging a hammer for Habitat of Humanity, convening peace talks among dangerous rivals abroad, supervising elections in fragile democracies, or inoculating children against preventable diseases, Carter has demonstrated true Christian greatness in seeking to fulfill Christ's teaching in his life rather than kicking back and taking it easy on his Presidential pension. He does these types of things because, he says, he is first and foremost a Christian, not simply a former President. He has come to learn about true greatness not from sitting in the oval Office of the most powerful nation on earth, but from sitting in the pews of his Baptist church, where he still teaches Sunday School and takes his turn mowing the grass.

Throughout my years of ministry, I have had contact with various 12-step Recovery programs. Whether it is alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling, eating, or co-dependency, people enter their first meeting with a single goal: they want to get sober. They hit rock bottom, realizing they cannot continue to live life the way they have, because soon their addiction will kill them. So, they start working the steps. They get a sponsor, and they go to meetings. For many, they are able to reach a state of sobriety from their compulsive behavior. But as they continue in the program, they come to realize they have a remaining problem. They come to realize that they are just as bitter, vengeful, jealous, shamed, angry, arrogant, self-centered, and grandiose as before; it is just that now they behave in these ways without drinking, using, or viewing. It is what Alcoholics Anonymous calls being a "dry drunk." Rather than just getting sober, 12-step Recovery is a program which enables a person to Think Differently. It is not just about not drinking; it is about surrender to God, or their Higher Power. It is not just about not shooting up or snorting, it is about making amends for the past with those they have harmed, and seeking to live a different way of life today. It is not just about what they view or don't view on the Internet, it is about daily self-examination, admitting mistakes and celebrating progress. And upon reaching the 12<sup>th</sup> step, they have come to realize that reaching out to the addict that still suffers is now their primary responsibility. It isn't just about getting and staying sober – as important as that is. It is about connecting with their Higher Power, connecting with the people around them, and living a life of Recovery. They start out wanting to stop drinking or smoking or whatever. But then they learn to Think Differently.

I can't help but think of the Scarecrow in The Wizard of Oz. His biggest goal in life was to get some brains and to use them. He would face the terrors of the Enchanted Forest, the flames of fire from the Wicked Witch of the West, and the thundering voice of the great and magnificent Oz in his quest. Yet at the end, the Wizard of Oz tells the Scarecrow, and each of the characters, that they just need to Think Differently. Their fears and assumptions weren't true; and so, he gave them some tokens and symbols to simply remind themselves to Think Differently. Jesus did the same thing. He took a child, and placed it in the midst of his disciples and stated that whoever welcomed such a child welcomed him, and not only him, but the One who sent him. He took bread and wine and told them about the coming Kingdom of God. It is not about power or position. It is about a cross, a broken body, and service to those in need. So how will you define, or think, about true greatness? As Jesus held a vulnerable child in his arms, what might we need to think and do differently to care for the needy, the homeless, and the vulnerable in our midst? The lonely widow? The new Afghan refugee? The struggling teenager? The hopeless addict? The fleeing family on the border? The arrogant co-worker? The enemy? The

rival? The person of the other political party? The person with a different color of skin or sexual orientation? What does greatness look like from the perspective of Jesus? How can you Think Differently?

Let us use all the brains, and all the faith, and all the talents and gifts God has given to each of us. Let us seek to live, and to think, differently. Amen

**Song of the Day**

**“Children of the Heavenly Father”**

**#781**

**Apostle’s Creed**

**Prayers**

Made children and heirs of God’s promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

*A brief silence.*

God of community, we pray for the church around the world. Unite us in our love for you. Help us overcome our divisions, that we are encouraged to work together for your sake. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

God of creation, we pray for this hurting earth. Awaken in us a new desire to care for this world and empower us to support agencies, organizations, and individual efforts to heal our environment. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

God of cooperation, we pray for nations of the world embroiled in conflict (*especially*). Inspire leaders to listen to each other and work towards peaceful solutions to disagreements. Protect the vulnerable, especially children, who cannot find safety in their home or country. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

God of comfort, we pray for all who live with mental or physical illness. Help them find appropriate care. Bring healing and wholeness when the path forward seems bleak. We especially pray for Peyton, Kathy Smith, Matt Miller, Bill and Betty Davey, Bob Kries, Jim and Sandy Nelson, Joe Christensen, Marilee Julson, Bill and Bonnie Kuehn, Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

God of compassion, we pray for the young people of this congregation. Renew in us your call to welcome the children in our midst. As they grow, strengthen their faith and our commitment to them. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

God of consolation, we give you thanks for our loved ones who have died and pray for all who grieve today (*especially*). Shine your grace on all your saints. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**Offering**

**Offertory Prayer**

God of abundance,  
you cause streams to break forth in the desert  
and manna to rain from the heavens.

Accept the gifts you have first given us.

Unite them with the offering of our lives  
to nourish the world you love so dearly;

through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**Words of Institution – We invite you to find bread and wine or juice and partake in this Holy Meal.**

(Holding the bread) In the night in which we was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread and broke it, gave thanks and gave it for all to eat saying, “This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

(Holding the cup) Again after supper he took the cup, and after giving thanks he gave it for all to drink saying, “this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. So often as you do this, remember me.”

Once you’ve taken the elements say, “Wellspring of joy, through this meal you have put gladness in our hearts. Satisfy the hunger still around us, and send us as joyful witnesses, that your love may bring joy to the hearts of all people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Communion Prayer**

**Sending Song**

**“Sent Forth by God’s Blessing”**

**#547**

**Blessing**

People of God,  
you are Christ’s body,  
bringing new life to a suffering world.

The holy Trinity, ☩ one God,  
bless you now and forever.

**Amen.**

Go in peace. The living Word dwells in you.

**Thanks be to God.**