

## Order of Worship for September 10, 2023 (8:30)

### Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

### Opening Hymn: “*Voices Raised to You We Offer*” – Hymn #795

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

### Confession and Forgiveness

P: Let us confess our sins before God.

**C: Lord God, we confess that we have sinned against You in what we think, do, and say, and what we fail to think, do, and say. Especially today we confess how we fail to be Your children and how we fail to care for the children You have given to us. We fail to be examples to them of a life centered on Your Word. Forgive us.**

P: In the name and by the command of our Lord, Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

### Responsive Reading (*based on Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6*)

P: Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

**C: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**

P: These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

**C: Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up.**

P: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

**C: “Honor your father and your mother.”**

P: Fathers, do not exasperate your children;

**C: instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.**

### Prayer

P: Almighty God, heavenly Father, You have blessed us with the joy and care of children.

Give us calm strength and patient wisdom that, as they grow in years, we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C: Amen**

### Hymn of Praise – “*Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds*” – Hymn #867

### **Old Testament Lesson -- Ezekiel 33:7-9**

So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

### **Epistle Lesson -- Romans 13:1-10**

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

### **Holy Gospel -- Matthew 18:1-20**

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter.

**C: Glory to You, O Lord.**

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.

It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them."

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

**C: Praise to You, O Christ.**

## Children's message

**Sermon Hymn:** "*Father Welcomes*" – Hymn #605

**Sermon:** "*Like a Child*" – Matthew 18:1-20

Sunday School begins this weekend, and as we celebrate the faith of children, we also are reminded of how much they need to know. One list of actual Sunday School answers describes children who think unleavened bread is bread without any ingredients, the Egyptians drowned in the desert, and Moses died before he ever reached Canada. Or, when they move to the New Testament, they think that the Golden Rule is do unto others before they do unto you, the epistles are the wives of the apostles, and Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple because they couldn't find a babysitter. If Jesus isn't just telling the disciples that they're cute, or that we're in another episode of disciples say the darndest things, what does it mean to receive Jesus like a child? What did Jesus mean? What did it mean for his disciples in the Gospel lesson? And what does it mean for us today?

Maybe being like a child means having a simple faith. A faith that is content with the Sunday School answer of "Jesus." Dr. Karl Barth was one of the most brilliant and complex theologians of the twentieth century. He wrote volume after massive volume on the meaning of life and faith. But when a young student asked Dr. Barth if he could sum up what was most important about his life's work and theology in just a few words, he just thought for a moment and then smiled, "Yes, in the words of a song my mother used to sing me, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

While “Jesus loves me” is a good song to sing, and it is enough to believe that is the case, that isn’t what Jesus is talking about. The disciples haven’t been arguing about complex theological distinctions. They hadn’t been breaking out their Old Testament scrolls to cite chapter and verse in their discussions. No, they’d been arguing about who was the greatest. They’d been arguing about who was best, who would get ahead. When Jesus tells them to be like children, he’s not telling them to be childish in their knowledge. He’s telling them to be like children in their attitudes.

And while Jesus commends simple faith, he does so as a starting point, not an ending point. When the disciples do not understand something, he doesn’t just leave them in their ignorance; he teaches them. When Peter misunderstands how Jesus will save the world, Jesus doesn’t just say that his simple faith is enough. Jesus tells Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!”

We live in a world that elevates the experience of children. Even though it’s been over a century since his first appearance, Peter Pan is still admired as the boy who won’t grow up, and in fact gives his name to those suffering from “Peter Pan syndrome,” those who can’t seem to grow up. Even though the stand alone stores are closed, some people still want to just be a Toys R Us kid. Whole industries, from toy makers to TV shows and more, are focused on children.

That’s not how it was in Jesus’ day. We think of being a child as a good thing. We think they’re cute and cuddly. As work gets stressful and college classes get hard, we may long for the days when we had all of our needs taken care of, when we got to spend time coloring, when we had nap time built into our daily schedules. But that’s not how it was in Jesus’ day. Children were seen as foolish, lowly, powerless, helpless, and insignificant. In the first century, there’s no other example of children being held up as a positive example.

That’s what Jesus means by being like a child. The disciples are arguing about which one of them is the greatest, which of them is the most important, which of them is the most independent. Jesus instead tells them to be unimportant and dependent. A child is dependent on her parents to be fed and changed, cleaned and cared for, and can do nothing to help herself. The disciples needed to realize that they were totally dependent on God, on Jesus.

Like children, we cannot do anything for our own. All that we have has been given to us by God the Father, our creator. We can do nothing to get ourselves out of the dirt and mess of sin that we’re trapped in. Left to our own devices, we’d never get free. We are totally helpless.

That’s why Jesus came, and that’s what the disciples didn’t understand. Even in the midst of their misunderstanding, though, Jesus continues on. He’s heading out of Galilee, where he’s been doing all of his teaching, and heading towards Jerusalem. He’s heading towards Jerusalem, towards the cross. He’s heading towards Jerusalem to be delivered into the hands of men, and killed. He’s headed towards Jerusalem to die on the cross for the sins of the slow-to-understand disciples that are with him. And He’s headed towards Jerusalem to die on the cross for the sins of the slow-to-understand disciples that are here today.

We still follow in the ways of those disciples, as much as we don't want to admit it. We're more likely to not understand what we are called to do, and instead focus on what we know how the world works. Like Judas, we turn aside to follow greed and ambition. Like Peter, we turn away when the going gets tough. Like the other disciples, we head towards lives that lead us to a place of safety and security, but at a cost of not following Jesus.

That's why we're called to turn and be like a child. We need to give up any thought of doing things on our own, and instead approaching God as a child approaches a dear father. It means recognizing our inability to change our condition on our own, and just trusting in God. It means giving up arguing over who is the greatest, and instead recognizing our own insignificance. Being like children in our faith means recognizing that. We don't believe on our own. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith in us through hearing the Word and receiving the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit doesn't just work through pastors and Sunday School teachers, though. Faith is sustained through family and friends, as children watch their parents and learn from their faith example.

Now there are those who think that faith is a childish thing. That as you grow up, you should mature out of believing in make believe. But as CS Lewis wrote, "When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty, I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up."

Jesus also points us to children as an example in learning. As Martin Luther said in his preface to the Large Catechism, "I am also a doctor and a preacher, just as learned and experienced as all of them who are so high and mighty. Nevertheless, each morning, and whenever else I have time, I do as a child who is being taught the catechism and I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the catechism daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the catechism—and I also do so gladly." As Sunday School begins, we remember that we are all lifelong students of God, and that we are to never stop learning, never stop growing in our faith.

Jesus finally points us to children as those who see God's kingdom the clearest. They are the ones who see the wonders present around us in God's creation. They are the ones who come to Jesus just as they are. The ones who realize that they are God's children, loved by God, because that's what God does. And that's what God calls us to realize, as well.

We may not always know all the answers to the questions we're asked about faith. We may occasionally think that Noah's wife was Joan of Ark, or forget all of the Ten Commandments. Jesus points us to children as those who see God's kingdom the clearest. They are the ones who come to Jesus just as they are, in humility and dependence and trust. That's a faith worth imitating.

**Confession of Faith: Apostle's Creed** (*inside back cover of hymnal*)

## **Sharing Our Ministry:**

### **Rally Sunday:**

*(The Introduction and blessing of Sunday School teachers.)*

*(Blessings of three year olds starting Sunday School, with their parents.)*

## **Prayer of the Church**

### **Lord's Prayer**

### **The Closing Prayer:**

P: Eternal God, since You have committed the care and nurture of children to Your people, graciously enlighten those who teach and those who are committed to their instruction, especially the Sunday School teachers who begin teaching this morning, that they may know the truth and trust in You all the days of their lives; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

### **Blessing (Pastor)**

C: Amen.

**Closing Hymn:** *“Lord, I Lift Your Name on High”*

