Order of Worship for September 6, 2026

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.
C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn – *"Voices Raised to You We Offer"* - **Hymn #795**

Confession and Forgiveness page 151

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm– Psalm 32:1-7

P: Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
C: whose sin is covered.
P: Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
C: and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
P: For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
C: through my groaning all day long.
P: For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
C: my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.
P: I acknowledged my sin to You,
C: and I did not cover my iniquity;
P: I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
C: and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.
P: Therefore let everyone who is godly
C: offer prayer to You at a time when You may be found;
P: surely in the rush of great waters,
C: they shall not reach him.
P: You are a hiding place for me;
C: You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with shouts of deliverance.

Kyrie (Lord, Have Mercy): pages 152-3

Hymn of Praise: *"This Is the Feast"* page 155

Salutation: page 156

Prayer

P: O merciful Lord, You bid us to be a community bound together by Christ's love. Guide us to be responsible for each other, as You have taken responsibility for us. Make forgiveness the hallmark of our community and build us up in true faith through Jesus Christ our Lord.
C: Amen.

Old Testament Lesson – Ezekiel 33:7-9

R: 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

R: 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.

Alleluia and Verse p. 156

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:1-20

P: The Holy Gospel according to St, Matthew the 18th chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord. (sung)

P: 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. (sung)

Sermon Hymn: *"I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light"* – **Hymn #411**

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

Earlier this summer, the WNBA caused controversy by releasing a list of the 30 best players in the 30 years of the league. It included a lot of good players, such as Sheryl Swoopes, Candace Parker, and Sue Bird, but it was talked about more for who was left out than for who was on it. As usual with the WNBA, they seem to forget Caitlyn Clark is a big reason for the increased interest in the league. Other current players haven't had a chance to achieve as much as some of the older players.

Arguing about who is the greatest can be a fun discussion. Debates over whether Michael Jordan or Lebron James is the greatest provides endless fodder for sports shows and sports columnists. As a Cubs fan, I'm hoping that Pete Crow-Armstrong beats Ohtani in the National League MVP race this year, even though the fact that Ohtani can pitch and hit usually puts him in a league of his own in discussions over who is the greatest. Outside of sports, others rank presidents, scientists, musicians, and more to try to rank the greatest.

Today's Gospel lesson begins with the disciples asking Jesus a question: "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matthew 18:1). This kind of question is very important for people trying to get ahead in the world…or, if they're of a religious inclination, to impress God. We human beings complain about rules, but we really like rules, mostly because we think if we can stay on top of the rules of the universe–or at least appear to be on top of them, we'll be on top.

I don't know what the disciples were expecting when they asked that question. Perhaps they wanted to hear stories about leaders like Abraham, Moses, Deborah, and Elijah. Perhaps they wanted to hear stories about servants such as angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Perhaps they were hoping that Jesus would tell them that they were the greatest, because of all they'd given up to follow Jesus.

Jesus' answer is unexpected. Jesus doesn't answer the question, or at least not right away. When Jesus is asked who is most important in His kingdom, Matthew says: "He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'" (Matthew 18:2-4)

Jesus beckons a child to come over, puts the child in the midst of the disciples, and holds that child up as the example they should follow. Indeed, Jesus tells His followers that unless they become like this child, they won't even enter into the kingdom of heaven, much less attain any sort of greatness in it.

And then Jesus says, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me."
What Jesus considers great is not what we consider great. In God's kingdom, greatness is not measured by capacity, skill, or performance. Greatness is measured by humble reception, even by dependence.

We mustn't miss Jesus' point here. Jesus is not saying that children are innocent and therefore, we should imitate them. Children may be gullible or credulous or unjaded; but, as any parent knows, children are not innocent. Like King David, writing in Psalm 51, Jesus knows and we know that every child conceived by human parents is born in sin. That means we're all born wanting to be in charge. Part of the job of those God puts in authority over children–parents, grandparents, teachers, governments–is to keep them and the rest of us from running roughshod over others who are just as loved by God as we are.

What Jesus is pointing to in this child He sets before the disciples is the status of children. No one is needier than a child. All children need someone to take care of them. Think of what Jesus is saying to the question posed by the disciples then. He tells them, essentially, "You won't even enter My kingdom unless you recognize that there is nothing you can do to make yourself acceptable for life with God!" When it comes to life with God, the number one requirement is our neediness, our complete inability to be good enough or righteous enough for life with God!

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.

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.”

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 always argue over who is the greatest. New sports stars rise up; older ones are forgotten. But we shouldn’t look for those who are the greatest. Everyone does that. Instead, we should look out for those who are the least. Those who are forgotten, overlooked. 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.

Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer: (p. 323)

Prayers of the Church:

Sharing Our Ministry

Offering and Voluntary

The Service of the Sacrament

Preface: page 160

P: The Lord be with you.
C: And also with you.
P: Lift up your hearts.
C: We lift them to the Lord.
P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
C: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

Sanctus *(Holy, Holy, Holy)* page 161

The Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Lord’s Prayer and the Words of our Lord: page 162

Pax Domini (Peace of the Lord) Agnus Dei *(Lamb of God)* page 163

Distribution

"Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" – **Hymn #686**

"The King of Love My Shepherd Is" – **Hymn #709**

Song After Communion: *"Thank the Lord"* page 164

The Prayer after Communion

P: Lord Jesus Christ, the price You paid for our salvation is evident in this meal – Your body is broken for our nourishment, Your blood is poured for our sustenance. Embolden us through this heavenly food to spend of ourselves even as You were spent for our sakes.

C: Amen

Blessing: page 166

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: "*Go, My Children, with My Blessing"* – **Hymn #922**

Postlude