**18th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Mark 9:30-37 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“You are a Servant to All”**

*30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. 33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” 36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”*

Warm Blessings is a non-profit organization in Elizabethtown that provides meals to needy people in Hardin County. Last week they implemented a new program – hot meals for homebound senior citizens twice a week. Jarrett Hardesty and his 4th grade son Kevin from Rineyville were two of the volunteers who delivered meals. In an interview with *The News Enterprise* Jarrett said, “We just want to help out, to share the love of Christ and show our children how important it is to give back to the community.”

Stories about service to needy people warms our hearts, and at the same time tweaks our consciences a little bit. We know that as Christians we could always work a little harder at serving others. We know that serving others can be difficult due to our attitude toward serving and our attitude toward others. Today in our lesson Jesus shows us how he served us. And he teaches this morning, “You are a servant to all.”

In our lesson Mark tells us that one day Jesus and his disciples were walking to Capernaum. Once they were settled in the house Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you arguing about on the road?” Silence… most likely due to embarrassment. They had been arguing, “Who among us is the greatest?” It was natural for them to wonder. Twice now Jesus had made three of his disciples exclusive. When Jarius’ 12-year-old daughter died, Jesus requested only Peter, James and John to accompany him into the house, where they watched him raise her dead body to life again. He asked those same three disciples to walk with him up to the top of a mountain where he was transfigured, he displayed all of his glory to them. They saw Moses and Elijah and heard God the Father speak to them. After they walked down the mountain they were mysteriously silent about the whole thing with the other nine disciples. Jesus had also given Simon a new name, Peter, meaning “rock.” Their argument revealed what was in their hearts: sinful pride and a lack of humility. Jesus’ answer to their argument must have surprised them.

**“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”** (vs35) Notice that Jesus does not condemn them for wanting to be great in his kingdom. He tells them how to be great in his kingdom. That individual will have a servant’s heart. They will be humble. They will consider others better than themselves. That kind of service requires sacrifice, which means that they will not always get their way, but will go out of their way, sacrificing their time, their talents, their possessions, to serve others and seek their best interests.

Nowhere is that more evident than with parents and their newborn child. Even though the parents have noticeable bags under their eyes, they change the diapers, feed their child, and spend late nights in a rocking chair because they love their child. They give up their time, their hobbies, their job sometimes, to care for that child.

For a servant in God’s kingdom no service is too lowly. Jesus drives that point home by taking a little boy in his arms and cuddles him, **“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.”** (vs37) Even helping a little child, the smallest and weakest member in human society, is not beneath those who wish to serve in God’s kingdom.

Finally, what motivates a servant in God’s kingdom to be so willing to put the needs of others ahead of their own? The answer is found in Jesus’ words, **“Whoever welcomes one of these little children *in my name* welcomes me.”** Serving others is a response to the love for Christ. Self-sacrificing service is motivated by the love Christ has for you, love that moved him to lay down his life for you, and for all people. We will be the servants of all.

But the mantra of the world says, “If you’re not first you’re last.” Sadly, that mindset is spoon-fed to us through our culture – the “Me society”. If something doesn’t go your way or someone offends you or wrongs you, you have a right to be angry, to sue them, or go to your place of work with a semi-automatic rifle. We expect people to serve us. We expect good service at a restaurant and when little Miss Grumpy Pants happens to be our server that night we complain, we are rude and leave a poor tip, if any at all. We expect good customer service at the store and when Mr. Grumpy Pants doesn’t seem to have the time of day for us it ruins the rest of our day.

And we may chuckle about this, but isn’t this true? We expect good service, but rarely want to be good servants ourselves. When God tells us in his Word, “Husbands, love your wives and be considerate of them,” yet too often we treat them like second-class citizens. God tells wives, “Submit to your husbands as to the Lord,” yet too often you rebel at the idea that God wants you to willingly support and honor and respect your husband. Husbands and wives don’t act like servants when each is trying to one-up the other, comparing, “Who has the more stressful job? Who puts in more hours at work or at home?” Children don’t act like servants when they make excuses why they shouldn’t have to do something mom or dad asked them to do. Church members don’t act like servants when they consider the work they do at church more important than what others do. Church members don’t act like servants when they complain that others don’t “pull their weight around here.” Is there room for rivalry in the Christian church, in the Christian home between Christian brothers and sisters? Not at all.

Maybe you try really hard to be a humble servant to all people, but you find it hard to do, because people don’t always appreciate what you do for them. They rarely acknowledge it. Oftentimes they don’t even know all the things you do for them… like the camera man or sound technician on a movie set. They do all the work to make the movie look and sound awesome, but the actor and actress get most of the money, interviews and recognition.

The bottom line is that it is a difficult thing to serve at all! Because naturally as a human being, I want to be number one. I want things to go my way. Every day of my life I fight against this idea that God’s will is first, everyone else is second and I’m last. Part of this problem comes from a weak relationship with my God. In worship and Bible study with other Christians, in devotions at home, God tells me about his great love for me. There he tells me how his Son Jesus served me. And if I neglect those opportunities to hear how much my God loves me, then my relationship with him suffers, and it is no surprise then that my relationships with others suffer. And when I stop having a servant’s heart altogether, or don’t even care that I don’t serve others, then I am in danger of losing the love of Christ in my heart, because that attitude of selfless service comes from a heart that knows Christ’s love, when that is gone, then Christ’s love is gone, too. Then it’s not that I just became last in the kingdom, but far worse, in danger of being thrown out, thrown into the kingdom of Satan and of hell itself.

Two months ago in Anderson, Alabama, Scott Childers, a volunteer firefighter, woke to find his house fully engulfed in flames. He and his wife were able to get their 17-year-old daughter out of the house while Scott’s wife, 42-year-old Beth, also a volunteer firefighter, went back in to save their 2-year-old grandson, still in the burning house. “She went to the back of the house, to the bedroom window where the grandson was at and made entry through a window,” said the fire chief. “She then handed the child out to her 17-year-old daughter, just before a part of the house collapsed, trapping her inside.” Beth Childers died saving her 2-year-old grandson’s life.

Jesus said, **“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.”** (vs31) Beth probably didn’t know she wasn’t going to die when she rushed into that house. Jesus knew. Jesus told his disciples that he knew that he would have to go into the fire, the fire of God’s wrath, the fires of hell, because of their sinful pride, because they had argued, “Who is the greatest among us?” How great is Jesus’ love that in spite of our unwillingness to serve one another, in spite of our pride, our laziness, our self-centeredness, Jesus willingly came to serve us, and serve us by dying! And not by dying a hero’s death, like Beth Childers, but a loser’s death, hung like a criminal on a cross.

And even though Beth saved the life of her grandson, her death could save neither her nor him from their sins and from an eternity in hell. By his heroic self-sacrificing act, Jesus’ death has made him the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. By his death Jesus has carried us out of the fire of God’s wrath. He has rescued us from our sins. He has lifted us up above the fires of hell. He has brought us into his kingdom. He has made us his children. His death accomplished all of this for us! Jesus went to cross keeping our best interests in mind, even though he knew it would be difficult. Jesus loved you enough to serve you by dying for you to save you.

An unlike Beth Childers whose ashes still lie in the grave, Jesus lives! **“They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.”** By his resurrection Jesus proved to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. No one has raised themselves from death. By his resurrection Jesus served you. For through faith in his resurrection, Jesus gives you the gift of life after death; life in his eternal kingdom in heaven.

I can only imagine the stories that little 2-year-old boy will hear about his grandmother. We might speculate that Beth Childer’s heroic act might inspire that little boy to do something great with his life one day. How much more so does Jesus’ death and resurrection move us to do great things… things like being a servant to all, just as he was for all of us. When we serve all, we are really serving Jesus. He said, “**Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”** (vs37) When we serve all people, we serve Jesus and his Father. What a high honor! What a wonderful privilege to serve others!

The opportunities abound! Like the family in Rineyville we can serve others at a soup kitchen. We can serve our military families by offering a helping hand while mommy or daddy is deployed or in the field. In the home: husbands, we will love our wives. Wives, you will respect and honor and help your husbands. Parents, serve your children by loving them, and bringing them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Children, you will listen to your parents and your teachers, and in this way you will serve your Jesus. As members of God’s kingdom, you will understand that no service you perform in this congregation is too lowly, or greater than anyone else. The greatest service we can provide is that while serving others we point them to Jesus, who served us with his life, death and resurrection. And so we will serve him with our whole lives. And look forward to that day when we can begin serving him perfectly in heaven. You are servants to all people. May God grant us the power to be his servants this week. Amen.