

25 September 2017
St. Michael and All Angels (observed)
SELC District Professional Church Workers Conference
Concordia Lutheran Church, Macungie, PA

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“The Greatness of Little Children”

Text: Matthew 18:1-11; Revelation 12:7-12; Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

It's easy to get greatness wrong. The disciples did. And so they got an answer they did not expect. That made them re-think everything they thought they knew. *Greatness looks like a child.*

If you need any proof that we tend not to think that way, check out the reaction of folks when they see a young child get in the seat behind them on an airplane. Or the next driver that goes cruising past a stopped school bus. In fact, many in our world today say that if you want to pursue greatness, you have to put off having children, or not have them at all. How different is Jesus and His ways.

And perhaps this is a particular difficulty for Professional Church Workers, as it was for the disciples. Who is the greatest? We have certain measuring sticks. But are they the right ones? Perhaps you can tell by what they do. If they make us prideful or if they make us despairing, if they make us think we are great or if they make me think I'm a failure, if they make me compare myself to my fellow church workers, if the world would agree with how we are measuring, then I'm not sure we're getting it right.

Because the answer, I think, what Jesus is saying to us today, is that you are never so great as when you are here. That you're not great when you're *doing* great things, but when you are *receiving* great things. Things that make you great in God's sight. **When you humbly receive the service of Your Father.**

Think about it, the service children get. Children are fed by their parents. We are fed here. Children are read to by their parents. We are read to here. Children are bathed by their parents. Here we are washed. Children are clothed by their parents. Here we are clothed with Christ. Children are born into a family, as we are here. And children are protected by their parents and so are we. And that last one - protection - is especially what St. Michael and All Angels is all about.

Coming from just outside of DC, when I think of protection I think of the Secret Service. The President gets Secret Service protection because He is great, and there is danger all

around him.

You have your own Secret Service. Angels guarding you. Angels who *always see the face of the Father*. They prefer not to be seen, but do not doubt that they are there, at the command of God, serving God's great ones, His children. Divine messengers. Divine warriors. Divine protectors.

For there is danger all around us. Visible and invisible. Especially from those once holy angels now demonized, who want nothing to do with our Father, rage against Him, and only want to destroy what belongs to Him. They lost their place in heaven and were thrown down to the earth, where their raging continues. Against you.

But don't mess with my little ones, God says! Attack them and you're attacking Me. *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting . . . ME?* Jesus says (Acts 9:4). And cause one of these little ones to sin, and there is not cement shoes, but almost - a great millstone in your future. And better to lose your hands, feet, and eyes than to sin. Serious business.

Satan doesn't want you to believe that, of course. That sin is so serious - at least not your sin. For those words there? Nah! That's just Jesus being like your mother when she told you that if you cross your eyes they'll freeze like that. Or not to swim for 30 minutes after eating. It's time to grow up, Satan would have you believe. Stand on your own two feet, move out of the house, make it on your own - make a name for yourself! Be . . . *great*.

Don't do it. Don't listen to Him. That is, in fact, to leave your greatness behind. For you will never be greater - can never be greater - than you are here, as a child of God. With your head wet, your heart bowed, and on bent knee.

For here, as I said, God's children are bathed and read to and fed and nurtured. *But with what?* The Body and Blood of the great one. With the Body of the one who took your millstone and hung it around His neck. With the Blood of the one who gave His own hands and feet and eyes and life in place of yours. With the one who took the fire of God's wrath against sin on the cross - that none of that be for you. That you be drowned not in the depth of the sea but in the font. That you not give up your body parts but receive His Body and Blood. That you have the forgiveness of all your sins - including, *or maybe especially*, your thirst for greatness. When you want to make a name for yourself and are not content with having His.

That's why the holy angels were so filled with joy when they got to announce the birth and the resurrection of Jesus. They knew what was happening. They knew it was all for you, the ones they are protecting and serving.

And then with such mercy, with such blessings, you get to live as children. Always. And

what a great thing that is.

For the things that amazes me about little children is how they are so different from *adult* me. How care-free they are. I worry, they trust. While I hold on to hard feelings and find it hard to let go, they come back 15 minutes later like nothing ever happened. They live for what is, not what was or could be. They love to help. They believe in their father and mother even when they've been let down so many times before. Mom and Dad says it's going to be okay, and it is.

Imagine if we lived like that! If our Christian lives were like that. Care-free. Not worried about the things of this world, but trusting. Not holding on to grudges but forgiving. Living for what is, living for others, always doing good, eager to help, and knowing that our Father says it's going to be okay, and it is. And that His Secret Service is on duty for you.

That's the life your Father wants you to have and has given to you in His mercy, care, and protection. It all starts here, continues here, and it will finally end here. When the angels of God have one more job, to serve you one last time, when they get to come and carry you home to your Father who is waiting for you. To the place Jesus has gone to prepare for you. They rejoice in this service too, I'm sure. In seeing another child of God, safely home.

So Rev. President, Circuit Visitors, Pastors, Deaconesses, Board Members, Church Leaders, Teachers, all of you - thank you for what you do. Thank you for your service. Thank you for the long hours and hard work which so often go unappreciated or even criticized. ***Those who turn many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever.***

But while that's what you do, and it may be great, that's not who you are and what makes you great. Don't get confused or let that define who you are. Whether you have a big church or a little church, are well-known or unknown, have a synodical, district, or congregational office or not - you're greater than all that. You're wet, you're fed, you're *angeled*, you're loved. For you are a child of God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.