



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea
The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida

“What is our Mindset?”
18th Sunday after Pentecost – Sept. 22, 2024
Mark 9:30-37

A Homily by The Reverend Jo Popham

Whatever did Jesus mean? The disciples did not understand Jesus. For the second time he predicted his passion. Not only did they not understand, they were afraid to ask Jesus to explain it to them. Instead while they are walking to what had become their home – Capernaum – they were arguing among themselves who was the greatest, who was the wealthiest, who was the most influential. Did each of them aspire to be in charge? Was it that simple? Or did they want what Jesus had taught them: to live into their real purpose – not to be served but to serve? Jesus told them (and he is telling us) “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” He recreated ambition. In Christian life they and we are not to aspire to be served but aspire to care for others.

William Barclay, the early 20th century theologian and prolific writer of commentary would ask us these days how we should and could use our personal gifts and talents to serve others, and even all people? His writings on this part of the Gospel according to Marc could so easily have been written about where we are today:

Every economic problem would be solved if [we] lived for what [we] could do for others and not for what [we] could get for [ourselves]. Every political problem would be solved if the ambition of [people] was only to serve the [world] and not to enhance their own prestige.... When Jesus spoke of the supreme greatness and value of the man whose ambition was to be a servant, he laid down one of the greatest practical truths in the world.¹

The disciples still did not grasp Jesus's teaching that they were to serve others, though he spoke very clearly. So he showed them. “He took a little child” in his arms, and he told them that if they could not put that innocent young one before themselves, then they

could not receive him or his message. And he made it clear that should they not treasure that child that they would indeed be rejecting God. Again the disciples were puzzled. What was Jesus thinking? Who in the world would place themselves after a child – the most powerless in any in their society? In the honor-driven society of ancient times, greatness was determined by whose company you kept. In the first century Mediterranean world, when people thought of children their first thought was not their innocence but their lack of status, their lack of legal rights. Children were the most vulnerable in society, and the most insignificant. If we were transported back to the first century, we would see many children on the streets begging, because they had been thrown away. (I dare say, if we were to visit some of our underdeveloped countries today, we would see the same thing.) So to welcome children rather than the rich and famous would bring noone honor at all. Jesus told the disciples (and he is telling us) that welcoming the powerless actually welcomes the most powerful – “the one who sent him” – his Father – welcoming the powerless actually welcomes God Almighty.

Most of us were welcomed into the church as a small child if not a baby. If you have children, you may recall their baptisms. Those newly baptized children were the center of our world. As they grew up, they learned the ways of God and, yes, the ways of the world. Everyone in the church was to play a part in teaching them to know God, to love God, and to serve God. When we made promises to our children in the church we hoped and prayed that their minds would always acknowledge God and Jesus as their center of their world. What is the world that they have inherited? What was the world like as they went off to kindergarten, and middle school, and high school, and on to college. The world our children and grandchildren live in is so different from ours. It is changing so fast, how can we fathom what they will see in the future. Their instruction comes from so many worldly things that most of us do not understand.

In 1998 Beloit College in Wisconsin created the Mindset List to identify the worldview of students entering college each year.² The list helps the faculty

understand the mindset of those students entering their freshman year. It began under the college's president who had been an influential partner in a powerful law firm and a good friend of Jim's in Washington, DC. Now to fill out who this versatile man was, he joined the circus to learn what a clown's life was like, but he also always had wanted to be the head of a small college, and he fulfilled that dream at Beloit. He has recently retired and has gone from molding young minds to working with wood. But I digress.

The "class of 2028" – are students entering college this fall. Most of them are 18; they were born in 2006. Here are a few things from the Mindset list³ that we might understand:

- Folks have always been tweeting (only later were they X-ing)
- Watches have always doubled as video players.
- Housewives have always been desperate—and real.
- Friend has always been a verb.
- In their lifetimes the cost of college has risen 55 percent.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Mindset List for our children had included living into their Baptismal Covenant has always been a goal in their lives? We could aspire to the same. If we seek and serve Christ in all persons, if we strive for justice and peace among all people, and if we respect the dignity of every human being we would not find it difficult to place others before ourselves would we?

Embracing the child, Jesus left us another teaching that harkens back to his teaching about caring for the "other." Yes, the lesson that the disciples – and we – are reluctant to take to heart is that embracing the child, embracing the one who has no standing, those with no wealth, with no voice, embracing the one with no value IS embracing him. How quick we are to see ourselves next to Jesus, like that little child. But it is not as easy as "friending" someone on Facebook, is it? It is human nature to reject what we don't want to hear or see. So often the disciples could not understand what Jesus taught over and

over again. Are we any different? Do we accept the parts of the Christian message that suits us and reject the uncomfortable parts? Could it be that we need to change our mindsets?

Lord, may it be so. Amen.

¹ William Barclay on Mark 9, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/dsb/mark-9.html>. In the same regard, Barclay also said “The divisions and disputes which tear the church asunder would for the most part never occur if the only desire of its office-bearers and its members was to serve it without caring what position they occupied.”

² In 2019, Marist College took over the publication of the list. Tom McBride is credited with this year’s list published August 1, 2024.

³ 1 They are the first generation to avoid the inconvenience of appointment TV.

2 Google has always owned YouTube.

3 Iraqi WMDs have always failed to show up.

4 Comet dust has always been retrieved and brought to earth for us to study and admire.

5 There has always been a female mass murderer.

6 Hamas has always been winning elections in Gaza.

7 NASA has always been keeping a close eye on Pluto just in case.

8 Water has always been suspected on one of Saturn’s moons.

9 Folks have always been tweeting, and only later were they X-ing.

10 Iran has always had low-grade enriched uranium.

11 Knowledge of the human genome sequence has always been total.

12 Montenegro has always been an independent state.

13 The US Armed Forces have never been in Iceland.

14 Liquid explosives disguised as soft drinks have always been part of the terrorist tool kit.

15 Tony Blair’s political career has always been winding down.

16 Watches have always doubled as video players.

17 North Korea has always been doing nuclear tests.

18 Northern Ireland has always been devolving,

19 Saddam Hussein has always faced the noose and lost.

20 New English words have always included “bucket list” and “crowdfunding.”

21 “The Departed” has always been pronounced “the de-PAH-ted.”

22 A film about a dysfunctional family and child beauty pageant has always earned 12 times what it cost to make.

22 George W. Bush did not begin to be popular again until they were ten years old.

23 American Idols have always needed two nights a week.

24 Housewives have always been desperate—and real.

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- 25 The year they were born was the last when Mom and Dad were getting red-packaged movies in the mail.
 - 26 “Friending” became a verb the year they were born.
 - 27 Phones have always doubled as flipable Razrs.
 - 28 Web nerds have always been ecstatic over RSS.
 - 29 You’ve always been able to generate your own brilliant internet content.
 - 30 Blockbuster has always launched, too late, its online service.
 - 40 As infants, they might have been scared by hoodies or oversized sunglasses but wouldn’t have noticed low-rise jeans or crop tops.
 - 41 PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii awaited their maturity, which would come, per always, faster than their parents expected.
 - 42 Enron has always been in the courtroom deep doo-doo.
 - 43 The Stoning of the Devil stampede in Saudi Arabia has always killed hundreds.
 - 44 Shakira has always been of the humble opinion that Hips Don’t Lie.
 - 45 Yet another Beatles break-up: Paul and Heather.
 - 46 Hannibal Lecter has always been rising for the last time, thank goodness.
 - 47 Cell phones have always turned us into mindless beasts, or so Stephen King would have us believe.
 - 48 Da Vinci has always needed decoding by a symbologist.
 - 49 A book about Lincoln’s cabinet has always given Barack Obama some ideas.
 - 50 Since they’ve been born the cost of college has risen 55 percent.