

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Mark 9:30-37  
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
 September 23, 2012

### **CHILDREN'S MESSAGE**

Kids, what kinds of things do your parents teach you how to do?

- Tie shoes      - Look both ways      - Don't talk to strangers
- Brush teeth    - Tell the truth                    - Fish

I was reading the "**Minnesota Conservation Volunteer**" magazine this week and I found a wonderful article about what **native American/Ojibwe** people teach their children. Remember that this country's first people lived in tents, hunted wild animals and gathered their food from wild plants, etc. In this article, we see how **native children** are taught to catch **wild rabbits** to eat. When an Indian boy/girl catches their first rabbit, their family and community make a big celebration out of it. Here's what happens:

"The rabbit is roasted or boiled, and the hunter is offered a spoonful of the meat. But the hunter has to refuse the **first bite** saying, "**No. I am thinking of the children who have nobody to provide for them.**" Then a **second bite** is offered and again refused, as the hunter says, "**No. I am thinking of the elders who cannot get out into the woods to hunt for themselves.**" A **third bite** is offered, but again the hunter refuses, saying, "**No. I am thinking of my family, my community, and the people who came here today to support me.**" The hunter is offered a **fourth bite** and then he or she can eat." ("Ojibwe Lifeways," p. 47, Oct. 2012 issue)

Kids, what are the Ojibwe people teaching their kids to do here? They are teaching them to **share what God has given to them**. Do your parents teach you to share? In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus teaches his followers to be "**servants**." He tells them that **his people** look out for the **well-being of others**, not just their own well-being. **God's people help**.

Jesus uses **children** as his example. He invited a little child to come to him and he wrapped his arms around the child and said, "**Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...**" In those days, children weren't thought to be very important. They couldn't take care of themselves. They needed adults to help them to stay alive. Oh, so do you. Jesus said that his people **take care of children**. Jesus said that his people **care about what happens to others**. Do you **care about others**? Do you **help others**? So does **Jesus**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

**I lost three of my heroes** this week. No, I'm not talking about some professional ball player or race car driver. No, I'm not talking about some past U.S. president or some CEO of a major car maker. No, I'm not talking about some movie star or rock singer. Our world, my world, lost three **teachers** this past week. They all **taught me** about **how to live life well**. **Do you know how to live life truly well?**

**Margaret Matalamaki's** funeral was here at First Lutheran on Friday. She was a mom, grandma, great grandma, a community leader, a church leader and a child of God. A huge part of her 91 years was spent in public service as a leader in a dozen or more community, church, education, health care, social service and government organizations. She gave herself away to make the world a better place. She wasn't wealthy in money. But she was wealthy in God's love. She taught her kids to look out for the needs of others without concern for how their actions might benefit themselves.

**Tammy Myron's** funeral was at Lord of Life Lutheran in Baxter on Friday. She was a wife, a mom to an adopted 5 year old, a community college special ed. instructor, a faithful worshiper and a child of God. Her dream job was working with students who had special needs. Cancer killed her at 49. She wasn't wealthy either. But she knew and trusted God's love and care. She also loved and cared for kids with special needs. She taught her husband, her little boy and her church that God is loving and trustworthy.

**Glady Theien's** funeral will be on Tuesday at Woodland Good Samaritan Nursing Home in Brainerd. She was a mom, grandma, great grandma, piano player and a child of God. Glady played piano for multiple nursing home services each week for as long as I can remember. When she became too blind to read music anymore, she kept on playing, but the pastors had to pick the ones she knew by heart. That was a long list. She also had a long list to pray for. She prayed for all of us visiting pastors I am sure. **Rob and Brita Williams**, teachers here in Aitkin, were on Glady's grandkids prayer list. For 88 years she brought people closer to Jesus.

**All of these women/heroes lived in the same tough, real world that you and I live in.** They all tried to make it a better world. They all left behind amazing numbers of people whose lives they had touched with God's love. They all died holding the hands of those they loved, of Jesus

and of the world and people they cared for. We lost three teachers of life who **loved and embraced a lot of children**. We lost three teachers of life who **loved and embraced Jesus**. It is our loss, but not theirs. **Jesus** still has **those three children of God in his embrace** and someday, we will see them again at God's great family reunion.

**Kids, kids, kids – everywhere are kids**. It is the start of a new school year. I have been in sessions with the two-five year olds and their parents. I have been with the third graders and their parents. I have been on retreat with the sophomores and their parents. I have been with the seventh and eighth graders and their parents. Next week we will be gathering the ninth graders and their parents. On the front page of the Aitkin Independent Age, leaders from Aitkin, McGregor and East Lake Charter Schools were featured. Kids, kids, kids – as they begin this new year of learning, in that big world out there, who will be holding their hands? Will Jesus? Will you? What will **they be learning**? What will **we be teaching**?

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus did some **teaching about how God sees our world**. Jesus has just announced to his disciples, for the second time, that he is headed for Jerusalem where he would be **betrayed, killed** and after three days **rise again**. They didn't get it. They didn't dare ask him to explain. They just kept on following him toward the next town. Pretty soon their conversation shifted. Apparently out of Jesus' earshot, they began to argue with each other as to which of them was the **"greatest..."** When Jesus asked them what they were arguing about they wouldn't say. It was then that he told them, **"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."** It was then that he wrapped his arms around a child and said, **"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."**

To this very day, we can't fully understand exactly what Jesus' death on the cross means. Maybe all we can do is try to **embrace the One who loves us** that much, and try to **embrace the ones that he loves**. **Jesus was going to die** and **they** argued about **which one of them was the greatest**. Someplace inside each of us is the desire to be important to others. Trying to be great in the **eyes of the world** often leads us to such things as judging, putting others down, gossiping and false pride. While in the **eyes of God**, we are **important enough for God to die for**. Instead of **striving for greatness**, Jesus teaches his followers to **strive for**

**service to others.** The One who was **about to die for the salvation/healing of all people** told them to become “**servants.**” This is the Greek word for “**slaves**” – the lowest social class who waited on tables. While Jesus’ original followers dream of **positions of power over others,** Jesus calls them to **positions of service to others,** like children.

Jesus talks about them welcoming children into their midst. In that day children were nearly worthless, classed on the level of slaves. There was nothing to be gained socially by welcoming children. Children had no political or social power. They were subject to the whims of their father. They were little more than property. Jesus’ kingdom gives status to those people who have none. **The One** who **dies for everyone welcomes everyone** and **lifts and embraces them.** **So do Jesus’ followers,** he says, lift the little ones, the weak ones, the needy ones, the hurting ones, the powerless ones **into the embrace of God.**

Who does **our world welcome and honor?** Who does our world care about? Who does **Jesus welcome and honor?** Who does **Jesus care about?** Because our world has so much of that all backwards, Jesus had to die on the cross. I don’t totally understand it, but that is what Jesus did. And when Jesus came back to life, he said, “**Come and follow me.**” **The children are waiting, all of them.** Are you ready? **Jesus is.** Amen.