

Matthew 18.1-20

Jesus is traveling from the Mt. of Transfiguration to Jerusalem to sacrifice His perfect life in an innocent death on the cross. The disciples ask: **“Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”** Jesus invites a little child into their midst and says: **“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.”**

- ‘*unless you turn*’ – a call to repentance. The disciples are called to turn from seeing greatness as privilege to seeing greatness as service.
- ‘*become like children*’ – those who are vulnerable and powerless.
- ‘*whoever humbles himself*’ – being fully and confidently dependent on the Lord.

In verses 5-20 Jesus teaches that the Greatest In The Kingdom are the ‘little’ [the vulnerable and powerless], the ‘lost’ and the ‘guilty’ living in their midst.

1. Caring for the ‘Little’ – the powerless and vulnerable among us. Matthew 18.5-11

Jesus strongly warns believers against

- Causing ‘little ones’ to sin [verse 5]...
- To put temptation in their way [verse 7]...
- Or to despise them [verse 16]...

Jesus teaches in these verses that greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven is about

- Faith in Him and trusting relationships with believers...
- Having a mindset of caring and encouraging...
- Resolving to make caring and encouraging a way of life.

Jesus is teaching his disciples biblical care giving skills.

- Old Testament Israel was to give special care to the *“widow, the orphan, the poor and sojourner in their midst.”* Zechariah 7.10
- Jesus modeled Zechariah 7.10 to the disciples as they traveled through Galilee calling people to repentance and faith, and the ministry of presence and miracles of healing among the people of Israel, including the outcasts.
- Jesus calls the church [us] to ministry among the powerless and vulnerable who are part of the fellowship of believers.

2. Seeking the ‘Lost’ among us. Matthew 18.12-14

The telling of The Good Shepherd account of Matthew 18 differs from Luke 15.

- Finding the lost sheep is so important that the 99 are left in the field unattended.
- ‘If the sheep is found, there is rejoicing’ suggests hopeful risk and uncertainty.

Life in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth will have successes and failures. We live in a fallen world in which Satan can disrupt Kingdom life. Jesus is teaching the disciples, and us, to model His costly and sacrificial seeking, bringing back, and restoring the straying to the fellowship of believers.

Is it irresponsible for the shepherd to leave the 99 and search for the one that is lost? One person writes: “By going after the *one* Jesus gave the 99 boundless security in that each of them knew “If I get lost he will come after me.” A failure to go after the one would leave those same 99 with the ultimate insecurity of realizing “If I get lost, he will leave me to die.” Yes, there was risk involved, but underserved costly love was given to the *one* and thereby assured for the *many*.”

3. Ministering to the 'Guilty' among us. Matthew 18.15-20

Just as God the Shepherd seeks the lost sheep with costly love, so Jesus commits the disciple to that seeking love.

- He seeks a brother who sins out of love for him to restore the fellowship.
- The call to repentance and renewed fellowship are made more winning by the added voices of one or two brothers more.
- And if they fail, the whole church pursues, carefully and caringly.
- The 'three-step' process is ministry; the expression of Jesus' will that no sinner is needlessly degraded, but is the concern of the love of the whole church; that the virtue of divine forgiveness is at work in their midst.
- [This is what is to happen among the 99 left in the field.]

Points to ponder: How would God work this lesson in my life in my church?

Jesus, in Matthew 18, is preparing the disciples for their work as leaders of the church. It is the same throughout the centuries. The year 2020 provides the church, this church, St Matthew, with unique opportunities to be known by love, live by faith and be a voice of hope to this world. Matthew 18 1-20 provides the ageless template for this unique time.

To love in the same way Christ has loves me:

- John 13.34-35: *"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."*

To know that worshipping God through alive or worship is sacrificial and costly:

- *Then Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* Matthew 16.24-25

To grow the 'go after' mindset:

- *My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, consider this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover over a multitude of sins.* James 5.19-20

To make divine forgiveness the way of life in my life, for myself and others:

- *Beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent His one and only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. And love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as the atoning sacrificed for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* 1 John 4.7-11