

Last and Servant of All 9-23-15

Lord, You know how we love to make ourselves look good. You know how difficult it is for us to Let Go and let You take care of it. But Lord, You also know that we long for Your peace. Cause us to humble ourselves. Amen.

There's a huge difference between being childish & childlike. To be childish is to be selfish, self-centered, to insist on your own way, to throw a tantrum whenever your will is thwarted. To be childlike is to be innocent, enthusiastic, non-judgmental, spontaneous, to enjoy the simple things w/gusto! Children are delightful in their thinking. When I was trying to make sure our daughter knew that the "small person" was not someone to ever tease or ask questions of – he just had very little legs so he was very short. She said in all innocence, "Maybe he just had too many birthdays!" You know, if you have too many birthdays, you don't get a chance to grow in between! Such sweet innocence! One time the cat got under her bed. She screamed from her bedroom, "there's a monster under my bed!" We told her it was just the cat. Later that day, I told her there are no monsters, & even if there were, God would take care of her. I told her the story of God taking care of Daniel in the lion's den – God can protect even there. She said, "Now I know, there are lions under my bed!" Our pastor was impressed w/that story, "See how she wanted to identify w/God's protection?" Yes, the innocence of youth is precious. How we as parents want to protect our kids from the real world – but it's impossible. Bad things happen. People get hurt; they react to life out of that hurt. We lose that innocence. We become tough

– we think we have to pretend to be someone we are not because we are sure no one would love the **hurt, broken person we are**. We brag about what we can - “My dad’s bigger than your dad!” “My dad’s got a 30/30!” I remember the boys saying. We start judging ourselves by worldly standards & want to be the best – the cutest, the smartest, the richest, the most liked. We get into the rat race – desperately looking for acceptance. If it’s any comfort, Jesus’ disciples did the very same thing – they argued about who was the greatest!

It is comforting to know that Jesus chose real people, defective people, needy people. There’s hope for us! The disciples were very human. They didn’t know how to handle the subject of Jesus being delivered into the hands of men, being killed, & rising again in 3 days. It seems strange, but so like us, they were afraid to ask Him. Don’t you wonder what were they afraid of? Did thinking of Jesus’ death at the hands of men sound like weakness? Did they not want to think of what might happen to them? If Jesus were killed, what would their fate be? So instead, they chose to argue about who was the greatest – eyeballs inward.

Jesus takes the opportunity to explain true greatness in the Kingdom of God. He who would be 1st shall be last of all & servant of all. He who receives “one such child” in Jesus’ name, receives Jesus & he who receives Jesus, receives the One who sent Him. Jesus is describing a **truly humble** person. Someone who is humble is comfortable w/ their strengths & their weaknesses – they don’t have to pretend to be

someone they are not. It truly doesn't matter to them if they are recognized or not. But humility is a tricky thing – if you think you are humble, then chances are you are proud of it – then you're not humble any more. It is very difficult for us to look at ourselves honestly. Our true humility – or lack of it – shows up in our interactions w/others. If we can receive a child (an innocent child who can't give us anything, can't make our reputations great, it won't impress any one because we hang out w/them), if we can receive one like that, we receive Christ & the One who sent Him.

The more we concentrate on trying to be humble, the more we miss the mark. If we are trying to be humble so that God will exalt us, we are still living like it is all about us. Our motives are still self-centered. We need to be challenged by what Jesus says, but there is no way we can walk in His ways w/o His love in us, w/o His compassion in us, w/o the Holy Spirit leading us. When Jesus says the 1st shall be last, our flesh either screams “I don't want to be last!” Or, “I will be last & others will notice!” Either way it is still the flesh! It is still our human nature. When the Spirit of God works in us, we don't care if we're 1st, last, or anywhere in between. We're so grateful to be apart of God's Kingdom it does not matter. Don't you wonder what the disciples' arguments were? Did it go something like “I'm the greatest because I gave up this great fishing business to follow Him.” “No, I'm the greatest because I'm the most helpful to Him.” “No, I'm the greatest – did you notice how He asked me to pray w/Him?” “He said my name first! When Jesus hears they were arguing, He said

the first shall be last! And they shall be servant of all! It was impossible for the men to be content w/such an idea on their own strength. And it's impossible for us too!

God puts His love in our hearts - we look at life differently. We have friends who are on a mission trip to the Philippines. They are w/the poorest of the poor on Trash Mountain. Before they left her prayer was for her heart not to be cold. His prayer was that they could connect w/the people. You guessed it. She texted "wish you were here to experience this amazing place!! You would love the people." Well, that tells you she's loving them. He said, "Just left the Santiago dump. So hard to say good-by." Sounds like he's connected! It is a privilege to love God's people. We don't look for influential people to love – we love the childlike whom God puts in our path – hungry souls who need a touch from God. We also love those childish ones – the sweet innocent ones who grow up & do things you don't want them to do, those who don't like you, those who say all kinds of evil against you. If you think you can love them, serve them just because you are a good person, think again. We run out. We burn out. We need to set boundaries. All of that must be done by the leading of the Holy Spirit –who helps us. God helps us love. Our eyes are on Him!

"W/God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition & exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly & freely do for us? And who would dare tangle w/God by messing with one of God's chosen?"

Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us & Christ’s love for us? There’s no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture: They kill us in cold blood because they hate you. We’re sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one. None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I’m absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.”

Romans 8: 31-39 MSG.

The point is, it doesn’t matter if you are first or last; it doesn’t matter whom you are serving - when you know who you are in Christ! You are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit, no one can rob you of your position. Jesus not only died, He rose again! He lives! He prays for you! You are washed in His blood! Your sins are forgiven! You are holy, righteous, & redeemed.

However, it **does matter** how you think. If you concentrate on what you are not, your neediness will come out in your relationships w/others. You will either have to put others down for you to look better, or you will be looking to others to make you OK – if you can please them, maybe you are OK. It’s called “people pleasing”; it

makes you lose yourself in a very unhealthy way. It is critical how we think. In my teaching days, I was a part of a clown club. We had a professional clown come & teach us how to face paint, etc. We'd do skits for the school. One time I had to hold a sign that said "Self Pity." Then I had to **be** self-pity. People said I did a great job! The way I had to do it was to keep saying things to myself like "Nobody likes me! Nobody cares! They like everybody, but not me..." When thoughts like that occupied my mind, I could stay in character. Negative thinking leads to negative feelings. Therefore, I urge you: Remember who you are in Christ! Think on these things. You belong to Jesus. He wants to be your friend. He died for you! He purchased your salvation! We are more than conquerors! Not just conquerors! More than conquerors! We can be first or last, serving in love because whether we live or die we win! If we live, we live to His glory. If we die, we have a home in heaven w/God! Forever! Amen.