

Eighteenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/B): "Garçon!"  
Mark 9:30-37  
September 21-22, 2024  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Who here has ever waited tables?

When I was in high school I did, very part-time, for free, as a candystriper at Morristown Memorial Hospital. It's a good thing they **didn't** pay me, because I **wasn't** very good at it and **definitely** didn't earn my keep. I remember the frustration of the hospital coffee shop manager when cheeseburgers were getting cold and ice cream was melting, because we weren't quick enough. (I **did** learn, though, that in order to carry a tray of coffee or Cokes without spilling them, you **don't** look at the level of the liquid in the cups or glasses, because as it sloshes you'll overcorrect. Instead, you walk as smoothly as possible and don't look at the beverages at all! 'Works like a charm.)

So let me ask those of you who have **professional** experience waiting tables, what **do** you do to do a good job? My guesses would be:

- Know the menu so you can answer questions and make recommendations.
- Get the order correct.
- Get food and beverage to the table hot (or cold, if they're supposed to be).
- Be watchful and anticipate needs, like beverage refills, more rolls, more napkins.
- Be readily available but not hovering or intrusive.

I'm asking these questions because in today's Gospel Jesus talks about **greatness** as consisting of **service** not **success** as the world sees it. "*Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.*" (Mark 9:35c) The word Jesus uses for **servant** is essentially the equivalent of our English word *waiter*. In Greek it's *diakonos*, from which we get the English word deacon, as in Deacon Ned, who has been ordained to a ministry of Word and **service**. Ned's area of service happens to be worship and music, youth and family Christian nurture and education. But this

Gospel lets us know that those who serve coffee hour, healing service luncheons, Care Corps funeral repasts, are performing as real a ministry as anyone who stands in the pulpit, presides at the altar, or sits at a keyboard.

It's so interesting that **greatness** and **service** are intimately related to **hospitality**. Despite the fact that Jesus has just shared a Passion prediction for the **second** time, announcing betrayal and death before His eventual resurrection, the disciples are hard at work on the road jockeying for position, trying to establish a pecking order among themselves, like who's going to get the corner office and whose name will follow Jesus' name on the door. Meanwhile, Jesus' train of thought is running on an entirely different track.

*"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...." (Mark 9:35c-37c)*

This weekend when we install our Sunday School and Confirmation Connection volunteers and staff is a perfect time to ask **why** it is an act of greatness, of service, of holy hospitality to welcome a child. **Any guesses?**

Well, children were worth bupkus in the ancient world. They had no rights of their own, no power, no societal value (other than parental affection, perhaps). Being nice to a child wasn't going to reap you any material or spiritual benefits, back then. **Hospitality toward a child**, Jesus says, **is holy because it's selfless**. There's no ulterior motive of material gain. There's no giving of a gift to receive a reward. The child cannot repay the favor in kind. This reminds me of the Jewish understanding of the highest form of charity: a situation in which the person doing the giving doesn't know who's on the receiving end, and the person doing the receiving doesn't know who's on the giving end.

Al & Frances Siemers and Elizabeth Townsend had no biological, adopted or foster children, but they claimed all of Holy Trinity's children as their own. They established a Siemer's Fund, a Siemer's Trust, and a Townsend Fund, to enable ministry to our children and youth that will bring them closer to Jesus and lead them further into the heart of this faith community. It is their gifts which help us underwrite summer scholarships to Crossroads Camp, youth participation in the National Youth Gathering, Good Morning, Good Friday tee-shirts, the Sunday School Carnival, and half the salary of our Director of Youth & Family Ministry. *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...."* We thank God for the legacy left by Al & Fran and Elizabeth. We sometimes ask, "Will our children have faith?" We can also ask, "Will our faith have children?" That's answered in the affirmative for Al & Fran Siemers and Elizabeth Townsend – and also for our church friends who shepherd and teach the children and youth in our Sunday School and Confirmation Connection. "Will our faith have children?" Yes, by God's grace!

**Greatness is servanthood**, it is **hospitality** to children and other vulnerable ones who cannot repay us in kind, and it is **sacrifice**. In our Lord Jesus' case, it was the sacrifice of His life on the cross. In the next chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 10, Jesus will say: *"For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:45) Jesus was **already** giving Himself away, all along the Way to the cross. He asks us to do the same. In the epistle of James we read that *"wisdom from above,"* holy behavior, is being *"peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits...."* (James 3:17) That's a lovely character description of a servant of Christ, one who waits on others in holy love, offering divine hospitality on earth.

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

