

Pastor Roy's Sermon from September 20, 2015

What does it mean to be great? Jesus and his disciples did not agree. Jesus forms his view of greatness from the justice proclaimed by the prophets and called for in the law. Who brings peace? Who increases compassion? Who welcomes the lost and broken and distressed and invites them to receive God's welcome. Greatness to Jesus is passion for others. Greatness for the disciples is about who turns the most heads and who makes things happen.

When the issue arises about greatness, Jesus declares that greatness is not in being served, but in serving. To truly care for another person is to serve that person, even if they are doing something for you. To value another, not because we want to get something out of them, but simply because they are—this is a point of great wisdom.

And so Jesus lifts up a child as an example of who is important. In other words, this is who is great. Children were not great to the disciples. Greatness to them is about power and accomplishments. They are powerless. They can't really accomplish anything. They just are. What can he mean by this?"

Jesus was questioning their values. He is questioning their obsession with making impressions and effectiveness, efficiency, and earning one's way in the world. Instead, for Jesus, we are valuable because we are beloved of God. We are, therefore we have value. It has nothing to do with what we do.

Think of the great people in your life through the years. Were they valuable because of what they did or who they were? Strangely enough those who understand their value based on being versus doing also tend to be willing to serve regardless of judgment of worthiness.

Respect is an ebb and flow issue. I respect and value, and I am respected and valued. Not because of what I do or what I "bring to the table," but because the image of God is imprinted on me. Jesus is challenging our value system. And, of course, this is not just about children, but about all that is weak and powerless or even unproductive.

We live in an interconnected web of value and goodness which flows from the goodness of God. We all have value. Jesus points this out by lifting up the least among them, a child. Children were especially vulnerable in Jesus' day. They had no rights. None. When we recognize worth in all of humanity, even the most vulnerable, we find a new kind of greatness. In this realm, a little child, or a firefly, or a healthy stream or river all have value.

All of creation has value and worth as well as the least among human beings. This is why we are concerned about the poor, about whether there is sufficient money available in state budgets for food programs. This is why we are concerned about refugees and whether we allow people who are fleeing horrible conditions to come and live among us.

We talk about welcoming the stranger, but welcome is much more than a smile and a handshake. Welcome is making room for another. Valuing another.

So, how do we do it? How do we welcome? How can we improve our welcome? We work with New Hope. We have ELCA and other ministries which extend the welcome beyond our congregation and parish. Is there more that we can do? The box for New Hope's food pantry is in the back, can we share more? Can we live a little more gently upon this earth? Can we support political measures that take more seriously our responsibility to care for this planet? More and more, the young people are getting it. Are we? Can the weak and vulnerable also be future generations who must figure out how to live peacefully on a planet with **increasing human population and decreasing inhabitable land**? The future will hold more migrations of refugees.

How is Jesus setting before us, today, our care for the earth and the most vulnerable of humanity. How can we act to value and support these? We cannot solve all of the problems, but we have opportunities to make a difference. May we act creatively to value all of creation and even the least among us...

Yet we are the first generation to have the facts that humanity has had a major role in changing the climate, actually for thousands of years. We can deny these facts which are accepted by the vast majority of peer reviewed scientists who have dedicated their lives to learning how to study and learn from one another, but in the end, future generations might look to the church and definitely to this generation with bafflement over why we chose to step on the gas rather than try harder to put on the breaks for human caused climate change. If Jesus were here today and he knew what many know now, he would hold the climate before us, he would hold the refugee crisis before us, and invite us to welcome the planet, and welcome the refugee. And many, like in Jesus' day, would walk away muttering about the crazy man from Galilee, all the more after he gave up his life for his beloved children.

We have to take this seriously as Christians, and as a nation with much disposable income, or we will be cursed in the future by the generations to come, and by the rest of the world imminently. Will we build walls to our own destruction, or will we give ourselves away, sharing of the abundance we have but did not earn. Let us give serious thought to the children Jesus places before us today. Let us question why we believe what we believe about these children. Perhaps the Spirit will give us new life and lead us into a renewed commitment to following this crazy man from Galilee. Amen.