

Mark 9:30-37

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' 32 But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

Last Thursday I was at an informal meeting with some clergy friends and for some reason, it turns out we were only ladies.

For some reason, one of us came with her baby boy,
and so for some other mysterious reason, the meeting turned out not to be really a meeting,
we were just passing the baby around, chuckling and tickling,
How cute, how nice, how lovely.

Is it very hard to welcome a child?
Is it really something we need to be taught?

I would like to say no
I would like to say it's the easiest thing in the world – as it was on this Thursday morning
I would like to say to Jesus: “Thank you very much but really, don't bother, we're fine here”
And I would like very much, I wish so much I had never seen this picture in the newspaper -
a picture you have probably seen as well.

Aylan Kurdi, a three years old migrant child washed ashore in Turkey,
lying on the sand, peaceful and gracious, looking like he's sleeping
although he is not.
“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me”

Well, Jesus, we did not.

And as a European, and as a migrant myself, I wish I have something smart to say
to address the issue.
Yet I have not.
As a Christian, the only thing I have are your words, Jesus.

But maybe this is already something.
Jesus picks the child and puts him in the middle of them,
who are arguing about social status, strength and greatness.

A few weeks ago, I was touring in NYC and our guide,
speaking of a politician who seems to have always something really smart to say about immigration,
and speaking of him, the guide said: “Really, this man, he is not afraid of anybody”

And because I had Jesus's words in my mind
And because I saw the guy on TV saying
We should be afraid of all these pregnant women crossing the Mexican border to give birth
to little US citizens we will have to pay health insurance for
I was thinking to myself: “This guy, really, he is very afraid of everybody”

This man, with all the power and the money,
he feels threatened by a pregnant woman.

Well, you may be the greatest in NYC or on CNN
But in the Kingdom of God,
or at least in the Gospel, the only one who is afraid of a woman with child is King Herod.

Don't get me wrong, this is not to point a finger at -
because this arrogant attitude is the extreme example of this power we secretly worship
or I would say – this power we hide behind

Because deep down inside ourselves we too are afraid
Hopefully not of pregnant women
But we are afraid of others, afraid of lacking, afraid of losing our privileges, afraid of losing control.

And although we pretend to be Christians,
to keep the control
we spend our life accumulating: stuff but also knowledge, diplomas, titles, relationships
this is so much what we teach our own children:
Be the best, be the greatest.

We want worldly power or we hide being this power
because we're being of what might happen, we're afraid of life, afraid of death
And as the disciples, afraid of what the kingdom is really about.
We pretend to walk with Jesus,
but we don't see and we don't listen and we don't understand
Most of the time, we go on without asking a single question to the Master
So sure of what we know, of what we do.

So today, Jesus asks us
instead of teaching our own children
to let our own children teach us

Children are not afraid of life and death until they realize we are
Children are not afraid of others until we tell them to be
Children are not afraid of losing, lacking or being forsaken
until we make them experience it.

As so as I was reading the Gospel,
and thanks to one of you who opened my ears during a Bible study,
I realized that maybe, we are not so much invited to welcome the children
as we are invited to welcome as a child.
Welcome as a child.

In church, we always think about growing, and learning and strengthening
But maybe sometimes Jesus wants us to decrease, to unlearn, to weaken
Because we are already big enough
And as the disciples we take all the space in the room.

I think this is what happens in this passage of Mark:

The disciples they already know so much
Their only way to take the next step, to be able to follow Jesus to the cross,
the only way is to u-learn
to let go, to renounce their knowledge and power so that God can reveals to them
what the kingdom is all about.

So what is the kingdom all about?
Well, we all have the answer
the kingdom of God is about love – we all know that.

But love can be so many things, right?
There is this pop song that parodies Corinthians 13 and goes:
Love is patient, Love is selfless, Love is hopeful, Love is kind
Love is jealous, Love is selfish, Love is helpless, Love is blind
And it resonates because we know that only too well – Love can be whatever we want it to be.

Well, Jesus sings his own song today and says:
Love is to welcome and love is to serve.
We wait to feel love to be welcoming and serving
when actually, we should start welcoming and serving
and welcoming and serving will teach us how to love.

It is the time we spend on people,
the hard work we put in for them
that turn us into loving people and that make people valuable to us
They get the value of what we give up for them
As a mother loves her child because she gives her life for him
(or at least stays up all night)
Jesus loves us because he gives his life for us.

Recently, I was serving in a food pantry
and I saw this guy coming in the line
He was carrying all sort of incredible trash in his kart
You could smell it from afar
and himself he looked like he hadn't showered for months
and you know, it's sad but I could not help having this movement backwards.

And as I was stepping back, I turned to my colleague, who is at this food pantry every single week,
and she was looking at the man
and there was this weird moment because
I was looking at her looking at him
And really I could tell
there was so much tenderness in her eyes
I thought well this must be the way God is looking at him
And when the guy left, she was still looking at him and she said: "How precious"

How precious. Precious he was indeed.
Worth her time, worth her efforts, worth – I am sure – all her prayers.

Jesus tells us today: Become a child, unlearn all you have learned
Been taught about life, death, who God is and what people are – or should be
Be humble, start serving and you'll know how to love.

And before saying "Amen", I would like to tell you that if you want to help with the migrant crisis, as I know a lot of you care to, the Episcopal church has put on line some resources and I am happy to discuss about them with you after the service. Amen.