

<sup>33</sup> And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" <sup>34</sup> But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup> And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." <sup>36</sup> And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

Today's Gospel lesson loses some of its punch if we think of it only in 21<sup>st</sup> century American images.

Little Children were perceived differently in Jesus' day than today. Infant mortality rates, of live births in Jesus day, were as high as 30%. (In West Virginia today, it is 0.7 %.) In Jesus' day, 60% of children were dead by the age of 16.

Within the family and the community, in Jesus' day, the child had next to no status. A minor child was considered equal to a slave.

Until a child reached the age of majority, they had no right to inherit the family estate.

The wisdom of the day exhorted fathers to physically beat their sons to cure them of their evil and

to provide necessary instruction to make sure the father did not suffer [abuse and neglect in later life](#).

Children were, however, important to give the [mother](#) worth in life. Her life was significantly devalued in the eyes of the community if she did not give birth to a male child. Children were also the primary source of [social security](#) for elderly parents.<sup>i</sup>

- We would never knowingly allow children today to be so treated – right?
- But how about what we don't know?

According to one nurse interviewed at a prominent WV Hospital birth unit: **“More children born in the hospital today, than not, are [“drug babies”](#) ([born addicted to drugs, and need to stay in the hospital for usually an extra two weeks to be weaned off the drugs in their system.](#))**

**That's MORE DRUG BABIES than NON-DRUG**

**BABIES**—in case you missed my point! Who says that what we don't know won't hurt us.

Small children were NOT thought of in Jesus' day like babies and young children are thought of amongst most of us. **That makes His message so much more the radical.**

Here were His disciples caught in the act – and embarrassed for it – of vying for the places of prominence ... to be “Jesus' best friend.” When he told them they had to begin to think of themselves in the role of a child, that meant a REALLY BIG change of thinking.

Jesus' message in the Gospel today still means a REALLY BIG change of thinking for His disciples today. I'm not just talking about life within the Church – and I DO need to share this good news with you ... because many of you don't realize it, without the experience of

so many other churches. Saint Marks is one of the few delightful churches where people are not “jockeying” for positions of importance. This Church is more interested in doing ministry than in who serves in what position. Thanks be to God for that.

But, preaching is not just about what goes on in the life of the Church. Nor was Jesus’ teaching.

Jesus was talking about a CHANGE OF THINKING for how we live in the worlds of

- Our job
- Our circle of friends
- Even our families
- Everywhere in the big old world outside of church, as well as inside.

You may have heard me mention it last week – **Jesus’ message was about living a life represented by a CIRCLE in which the CENTER of the circle is not me, is not you. Rather, the**

## **center of the Circle is God.**

When we put ourselves into that sort of life view, we are moving our own importance out from center stage. THAT is not easy for me or for you, because like you, **I spend more time with me than I do with anybody else.**

Jesus is talking about a change of paradigm, a change of world view. Sometimes that is hard to accept. Sometimes people look at what Jesus talks about, and ... laugh ... thinking that He was making a little joke.

**“Really? A child? Hardy-har-har. Let’s be serious here, OK. Let’s talk about the real world, OK, Jesus?”**

I was talking to a businessman from the northern panhandle region, who has a pretty comfortable 6 figure salary. He was talking to me about how he wanted to give that up and to get his life into order ... to move into the direction of a more self-less career. Well, you don’t have any idea of whom I’m talking about, so let me be

frank. He wants to give up his six figure annual salary and become a minister.

He told me that he is constantly surrounded by people who only want to advance, advance, advance. If he says to them something along the lines of, ***“I’m not really interested in getting a big salary increase or in taking on my same kind of job in Pittsburgh; I’d like to get out of this business into a servant kind of job,”*** then people will laugh, and within a day or so, he will hear from someone in the Pittsburgh area who inquires, ***“I hear you’re looking to advance your career in our area. Let’s talk about that.”***

He says, ***“They just can’t imagine not climbing a ladder of success.”***

Imagine that. I think that this is what Jesus is talking about.

It takes a RADICAL WAY OF THINKING DIFFERENTLY in order to do this.

It's as radical as wrapping your head around the sermon title: "1 + 1 doesn't always = 2."

***"Oh, this is some kind of trick with words or numbers, Preacher. We know better."***

No – it's just thinking outside the box.

If I have ONE wad of gum in my mouth, and I add ONE MORE wad of gum into my mouth, what do I have? I still have ONE WAD OF GUM IN MY MOUTH.

No tricks. It's just being open to new ways of seeing things.

This past summer in Vacation Bible School, Eli Parrish was here every night. He was really interested in what we talked about. When we talked about the ELIJAH story, he said, "That's my name!" with some pride.

I found out from his mother on the following Sunday that Eli said he wanted to be baptized.

So TODAY is a time in which we can BEGIN to take seriously what Jesus was saying to His disciples (and us.) Take out your hymnals and turn to page 34 – question 8, middle of the page. Look at the words you have already said, during the liturgy for Eli's Baptism. Remember saying:

**With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround Eli with a community of love and forgiveness, that he may grow in his trust of God and in his service to others. We will pray for him, that he may be a true disciple who walks in the way that leads to life.**

How you treat Eli is the same as how you treat Jesus.

- If you ignore him, **you ignore Jesus**.
- If you don't give him an example to see of people living with God at the center of their lives instead of themselves – **well, you just lied to God and to Eli**. Jesus and Eli are DEPENDING ON US to do what we promised .



That's **NOT** easy stuff – **IF** we don't change the way we think.

But once we allow Jesus to nudge us into a new way of thinking, we might understand that business man in the northern panhandle area who can't figure out why seemingly nobody else gets it.

- It gets under your skin;
- it changes how you see life.

And then IT'S NOT HARD AT ALL.

**When we live THE WAY GOD DESIGNED US TO LIVE, then what used to be hard isn't any more.**

The sermon notes refer to TWO times when  $1 + 1$  does not = 2. **Besides a wad of bubble gum, here's another: LOVE.**

- When one loves another, they are not “another” anymore.
- The reason you can't love your enemy is that when you love your enemy, s/he is no longer an enemy.

- When Saint Francis kissed the leper, the leper changed into Christ. It was the act of love -- the kiss - - that made the change.

When you love someone else – like you have promised to do with Eli, then you **“love your neighbor AS YOURSELF.”** Not love your neighbor AS YOU LOVE yourself.

1 + 1 = 1. Not tricks of math, nor tricks of words. It's just a new way to see life. **And a new way to ENJOY life. It's the way you were designed, so why not claim it.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>i</sup> Source of above (except WV infant mortality): John J. Pilch, “The Cultural World of Jesus” pp. 139-40