

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 11 September

Children's Talk: There's a Place for You

One of the hardest times in life can be when we start to wonder if there is a place for us. We see other people with their friends, and can begin to think that we don't belong. As you get older, being chosen for a sports team can make this feeling come up. What if I'm chosen last? What if no one wants me? What if I'm not good enough to be on the team?

The beautiful thing about the Lord and His kingdom is that there is a place especially prepared for every single person. Even the lowliest of the low has a place prepared by the Lord:

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know. (John 14:1-4)

There is a place for us, a place that the Lord has made ready and that has prepared us for.

Partly that place is in heaven; but it's also here on Earth. The Lord has prepared you for something special, that no one else could ever do. And He has a job for you that no one else can do. It's a bit like a puzzle: I have the board here, and then all these pieces. Each piece has a place that it goes; and without every piece the puzzle would not be complete.

You have a place in the world; and without you the world would be incomplete. You have some way of showing love that no one else can do. You have a way of understanding things that only you know how. You have talents and skills that can help people in ways that are unique to you.

There is a place for you in the Lord's Kingdom. And without you the Lord's Kingdom would be missing something important.

To Be Part of a Whole

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn
11 September, 2022

I. The Point of Communities

There is immense power in community. There are things that people can accomplish as a group that they could never accomplish as individuals. This power is especially present when a group looks to the Lord together. Jesus made clear this power even in a small group of people:

Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”
(Matthew 18:19-20)

Somehow there being two people, agreeing together, or simply two or three people gathered, could bring the power of the Lord to bear in a way that neither of the individuals could accomplish on their own. It somehow brought the Lord's presence in a unique way. I hope today that we can recognize some of this power that is present when people gather in the name of the Lord. Gathered together in community we are a far greater force for good than we would be if each and every one of us simply stayed home and looked to the Lord solely in the privacy of our own minds. **[Sticks]**

It would be easy to see this as raw math: of course two people following the Lord has more power than one person following the Lord! But the more people work together in following the Lord the more their efforts are not added together but rather multiplied. Take for instance two people, each of whom wants to serve the Lord. On their own, they each could and would strive to do the right things. But then imagine that they come together to achieve their goal of serving the Lord: the individual loves and insights and talents that each brings to the table will affect the other. To give just one example, perhaps one cares deeply about obeying the Lord while the other care deeply about people. Their individual loves will blend together and strengthen each other if they are willing to work together. The one who loves obeying the Lord will be reminded that all of the Lord's commands are for the sake of others; and the one who loves other people will be reminded how the best way to serve the neighbour is by listening to the Lord.

Jesus talked about the power of just two or three coming together this way. The power of hundreds, thousands, millions of people working towards a common goal under the Lord's guidance is incredible. Again, it is not just that two is more than one; it's that in community we grow through being part of something bigger than ourselves and we learn from the infinite variety of people who are unique and different from ourselves.

II. The Parts that Make up the Whole

That being said, a community, a group of people working together, only exists when there are individuals to be part of it. Jesus taught that His kingdom was not one that would be visible in the world but one that would exist in the hearts and minds of its members:

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

The Kingdom of God exists when we as individuals choose to be part of it.

But what does it mean to be part of something? Part of a church, a school, a community? Part of a movement, a cause, a purpose greater than yourself? We look at these things that we belong to and think of them as if they existed in themselves, apart from us, and we, from the outside, step into it. We join a church, a school, a community. We take part in a movement, a cause, a purpose. But the truth is that none of these things exists apart from the people who make it up. Without the individual members, there is no church, no school, no community, no movement, no cause, and no purpose (cf. HH 56).

We talk of organizations as if they have a life of their own: "The company made some good decisions last years;" "The rugby team is making good progress." But of course, no organization does anything apart from the individual choices of its members. A company or rugby team cannot make decisions. People make decisions, and together those individual decisions become the decisions of a group.

The church is no different. We may talk of the church as a separate entity that does things; the reality is that the church only exists insofar as the individual members are living and being the church. Each of us is a part of the greater whole, and the quality of the church will be determined by the quality of our lives. If we want the church to be more loving, then each of us as individuals must be more loving. If we want the church to do more to stand up for the oppressed then each of us as individuals must do more to stand up for the oppressed. If we want the church to be more relevant in today's world, then each of us as individuals must make it more relevant on a daily basis. The church can do nothing apart from the member who make it up. More broadly if we want anything to more reflect the values we hold dear, whether it be our schools, our communities, our country, our world, then we as individuals must embody those values daily. **[Fractals]**

When we look at the world we can despair that our individual efforts will make a difference. We cannot possibly do it all. And to some extent that is the point: that is why we need to be part of a community! But just as we need the community, the community needs us. What we talked about in the children's talk, that the Lord has a place for each and every person, a special and unique role that no one else can do; that applies just as much to adults as to children. There is a reason the Lord has put you where you are, with just the talents and skills that you have. There is a reason the Lord has brought you into contact with the people around you. Do not doubt that your presence and participation makes a difference.

III. United in the Lord

We are not the ones who need to bring all these efforts together. That is something that only the Lord can do. When we all as individuals rely on Him He weaves our efforts into one grand effort towards love and faith. He is the vine, we merely the branches; and it is by abiding in Him that we are united in that vine (John 15:5--7). The Teachings of the New Church explain that we join ourselves to the Lord through mutual love or charity:

Mutual love or charity causes things, though varied, to be one, for it makes one out of varied things. If all, no matter how many - even ten thousand times ten thousand - are governed by charity or mutual love, they have but one goal in view, namely the common good, the Lord's kingdom, and the Lord Himself. Variations in matters of doctrine and in forms of worship are like the variations that exist with the physical senses and with the inner parts of man's body, which, as stated, all contribute to the perfection of the whole. Indeed the Lord flows in and works by way of charity though in different ways according to the disposition of each individual. And in so doing He arranges every single person into a proper order, on earth as in heaven. In this way the Lord's will is done, as He Himself teaches, 'on earth as it is in heaven'. (*Secrets of Heaven* §1285)

There are 7 or 8 billion of us on this planet. Yet to the extent each of us allows ourselves to be led by the Lord's Divine love we are one. We are not one because we agree and are all, or could all be the same; far from it! We are one because in our immense differences we still all follow the one shining purpose of Divine Love.

As the passage said it is like how the body works. If the body were made entirely of skin cells, or bones, or muscles, it would be completely and totally useless. It is because of the immense variety in cells and body parts that the body works so smoothly as one unified organism. The bones don't need to act like skin or vice versa; the leg doesn't need to know how the arms work. The one mind directs them all. Just think how much is going on in your body with the simple motion of your hands; and yet in our minds we perceive it as one continuous action.

Likewise our differences, as varied and complicated as they are, are precisely what allow us to be united in the Lord. We don't need to smooth out all the differences between us, nor do we need to judge someone else's relationship to God. We don't need to precisely understand how someone else's faith and love work to be able to do our part, and to trust that we are united provided that we are all looking to God with an eye towards living a good life.

IV. Conclusion

The whole is greater than its parts; and to be part of a community that is dedicated to the Lord and to His love is greater than any work we can accomplish on our own. Yet in this great community we do not simply become nameless cogs in a machine; each of us has a place; each of us has something unique to contribute to the whole; each of us has our own relationship with the Lord that is of the utmost value and worth. We are many, but we are one in the Lord.