



## Lectionary Bible Study Our Savior Lutheran Church

### Readings – Feast of St. Francis

Psalm 148

Philippians 3:4b-14, Matthew 18:1-5

[Click here](#) to join Pastor Mark for a Live Zoom conversation each Wednesday at 10am.

Meeting ID: 868 8793 0554 Password: 654321

Or dial in for audio only: 1-301-715-8592

### Matthew 18:1-5 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup>He called a child, whom he put among them, <sup>3</sup>and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

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This story takes place not long after Jesus is transfigured and appeared with Moses and Elijah – so the disciples must have been excited about what would happen next! The disciples must have had some fame in the region of Galilee. They were the “entourage” of Jesus! Jesus, the one who was healing and gathering crowds to hear him teach or to simply be in his presence.

1. *Who are the “famous” people in your town? Who would you list as the town’s heroes?*
2. *What makes those people famous – is it wealth? Generosity? Political power?*

The disciples ask the question, “who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

3. *Why do you think they asked this question? What response were they anticipating?*

With Jesus our expectations are always turned upside down (for the best, of course!). So Jesus responds to their question by using a child as a model of greatness. Children were the weakest, most vulnerable members of society. Infant mortality rates sometimes reached 30%. Children were loved, but vulnerable.

4. *What would be the disciples’ reaction to seeing a child used as a model for greatness?*

Jesus continues to note that the disciples need to CHANGE to become like the child. The one who is humble like the child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Children are, by nature, dependent upon others for all of their basic needs. They also trust others (until adults show themselves to be untrustworthy). Children don't innately understand power or prejudice – playmates are determined without regard to social status). Jesus speaks specifically to the humility of a child. We tend to think of humbleness as a good thing, forgetting that it is the same root as humiliation.

5. *Is Jesus telling the disciples to be humiliated?*

October 4<sup>th</sup> is the feast day for St. Francis of Assisi. He was born in 1181 into a wealthy family in Italy. His father was a cloth merchant and named his “Francesco” meaning Frenchman – Francis’ dad hoped his son would love France and find wealth and success there. As a youth, he partied excessively. Francis had a charming personality and was good at business. Francis longed to have the nobility of a knight. Francis set off to fight in the fourth crusades, but didn't get very far. The first night of his trek Francis had a dream in which God told him he had it wrong and he should return home.

6. *Francis had left the business seeking nobility. But his battle armor never got a scratch. How would Francis be received home, after never seeing battle?*

Francis had been humiliated, but he wasn't yet converted from his selfish desires for glory. That took time. Ultimately, Francis left his family, his business, and even clothes, going into the woods to be with “Our Father which art in heaven.” Francis had spent years chasing lovely things, only to discover the beauty of God's creation far surpassing that of anything humans made – even preaching to birds about being thankful to God for their wonderful clothes. There are many stories of Francis and animals – hence the reason we do a pet blessing in conjunction with this day!

His magnetic personality drew others into the woods with him, becoming the brotherhood of Franciscans. Francis did not seek to abolish poverty, but to make it holy. He and his brothers lived in absolute poverty, but would give it all away should they encounter someone worse off than them. Francis continued to preach the gospel, even travelling the world. His life of poverty and working to exhaustion took a physical toll on him, and he was blind for his final years. In his blindness, he wrote the “Canticle of the Sun” (which we have paraphrased as the hymn “All Creatures of Our God and King.”).

7. *How does St. Francis relate to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18?*

Our passage today ends with Jesus saying “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”

8. *Is Jesus speaking only about children?*

9. *How is greatness in the kingdom of heaven similar to greatness in our world? How is it dissimilar?*