

Sunday, September 6, 2026

Proper 18A | 15th Pentecost

Matthew 18:1-20 Focus: 18:10-14

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Who is the Greatest?

My friends,

We spend a lot of time
either trying to avoid notice
or to be noticed.
“We need volunteers for...”
Unnoticed.
“Who wants the last piece of pie?”
Notice me! Notice Me!

There’s a reason

that Noxzema used
the classic advertising tagline
"Noxzema girls get noticed"
for its skin care products.
Overall,
we want to be noticed.
We want to be seen.
We want to be valued.

And we want to notice others.

We want to follow the cool people.
We want to see
what the powerful are up to.
We want to see
“Who is the greatest.”

The problem is,

we often overlook the people Jesus cares about.
We naturally notice the people who are:
- impressive
- useful
- influential
- easy to love
- or difficult enough
to demand our attention.

But Jesus sees the little ones.
Jesus came to seek the lost.
He does not despise the little ones.
He seeks them
when they wander.
Jesus rejoices
when they are restored.
Jesus gathers them
into His family.

And He desires
that we become congregations
that see,
receive,
seek,
and rejoice
over the little ones
God has placed among us.

I. See the Little Ones

My friends,
Jesus' disciples ask,
*"Who is greatest
in the kingdom of heaven?"*
And Jesus puts a child
in their midst.
The disciples are looking up,
wondering,
"Who matters most?"
Jesus teaches them
to look differently.
*"See that you do not despise
one of these little ones."*

And then He gives them a parable:

*“If a man has a hundred sheep,
and one of them has gone astray,
does he not leave the ninety-nine
on the mountains
and go in search
of the one
that went astray?”*

The disciples are looking up,
trying to find the greatest.
Jesus tells them
to look down.
And then He tells them
to look around.
Look at the child.
Look at the little one.
Look at the person
who might otherwise disappear
from your attention.

Because we naturally measure people
by their usefulness.
We notice the influential person.
The successful person.
The person with money
and connections.
The person who excels.
“Get them on board,
and we have it made.”

We notice the difficult person
who demands attention.
“Fix that problem,
and everything will be better
for us.”

But then

there are the people we overlook.
 The ordinary people.
 The people in the middle.
 The people who don't have much
 to offer us—
 and don't make demands of us.
 We overlook the poor
 and the weak.
 We are tempted
 to practice partiality.
 But Christ does not.

No one is valuable

because we need them.
 They are valuable
 because Christ values them.

We do not reach out

because we need
 to fix our numbers
 or our budget.
 We declare the forgiveness
 of sins
 in Christ's name
 because His love compels us.
 Everyone we meet is someone
 for whom Christ shed His blood.
 So Jesus says, "*See.*"
 "*See that you do not despise*
one of these little ones."

See them.

Not merely, "Be nice to them."
 Not merely "Run a program for them."
See them.
Know them.
Love them.

See the elderly person sitting alone.

See the shut-in
who can no longer leave home.

See the child
who has no friends.

See the visitor
who doesn't know anyone.

See the person
whose past makes others uncomfortable
—even though they have confessed their sin
and received absolution.

See the person
who is quietly drifting away.

See the person struggling
with sin.

See the person who has never heard the Gospel.

Why should we see them?

Because Jesus sees them.

We see “the least.”

Jesus sees precious “**little ones.**”

And Jesus is teaching us
to see them
as He does.

II. Jesus Seeks the Little Ones

My friends,

Jesus doesn't merely see the little ones;

He goes looking for them.

He doesn't just tell us
to notice them.

Jesus tells us
to lead them home.

This one sheep out of 100

has gone astray.

But Jesus will not leave him there.

For a sheep without the Shepherd
has only burden and death.

In 2015,

Chris the Sheep was found
in Australia.

He had been lost
for an estimated five to seven years.

Sheep cannot shed
their own wool.

When lost
or abandoned,
their wool keeps growing continuously,
trapping dirt,
twigs,
manure,
and moisture.

That alone becomes life-threatening.
Chris's rescuers sheared 90 pounds
of accumulated wool
in a single shearing.

Wandering

and sin
are real dangers.
Straying from Christ is death—
unless He finds us.
He must cut off our **sin**
and throw it away.
Otherwise **we** will be thrown
into the hell of fire.

There is also a real temptation
for the church
to despise,
neglect,
or overlook
the wandering person.

*“If a man has a hundred sheep,
and one of them has gone astray,
does he not leave the ninety-nine
on the mountains
and go in search
of the one that went astray?”*

*When sheep wander,
Jesus takes the initiative.
For His Father’s will is
that none of them perish.
The parable isn’t about
a lost sheep finding the way home.
The **Shepherd** goes.
The **Shepherd** searches.
And the **Shepherd** finds.
“And...he rejoices over it
more than over the ninety-nine
that never went astray.” (Matthew 18:13)*

*We may think,
“They’re not here anymore.
I guess they don’t care.”
Jesus says,
“I care.”
We may think,
“They’ve wandered too far.”
Jesus says,
“I will seek them.”
We may think,
“They are not worth the trouble.”
Jesus says,
“It is not the will
of my Father
who is in heaven
that one of these little ones
should perish.” (Matthew 18:14)*

So the Good Shepherd
still seeks His sheep today.
How?
He seeks them
through His shepherding Word.
The Word His Church still speaks.

Jesus gives the Church a pattern.
*“If your brother sins against you,
go and tell him his fault,
between you and him alone.
If he listens to you,
you have gained your brother.”*

The way back is listening.
Listening to the Word.
*“So faith comes from hearing,
and hearing through the word
of Christ.”* (Romans 10:17)
The Word
that carries us
to repentance
and forgiveness.

That Word welcomes you
with open arms.
But it also warns.
If you ultimately refuse
to listen
to the law and gospel
the congregation speaks
to you,
you are not a sheep. (Matthew 18:17)
For His *“sheep hear [His] voice,
and [He knows] them,
and they follow [Him].”* (John 10:27)

The Church has the authority
to proclaim
and apply
Christ's Word
from the Bible.

*“Truly,
I say to you,
whatever you bind
on earth
shall be bound
in heaven,
and whatever you loose
on earth
shall be loosed
in heaven.
Again I say to you,
if two of you agree
on earth
about anything they ask,
my Father in heaven
will do it
for them.
For where two
or three
are gathered
in my name,
there am I among them.”* (Matthew 18:15–20)

Christ continues seeking His sheep
through His Church.
The Church
that speaks His Word.
The Church
that prays His will.
The Church that gathers
in His name.

He gathers the lost
into His flock.
Into His Word.
Into His name.

That's fellowship.

Not just

Christians enjoying being together.

Christians lovingly watching
over one another.

Speaking the Word
to one another.

Praying
with one another.

Seeking one another
when we wander.

Forgiving
one another.

Being together
in Jesus' name.

Christianity is no solo walk.

No private affair.

Christianity is life
in Christ's body.

Life in the church,
with the other 99.

And the Church is a search party.

It is joining the Shepherd
in seeking people
who need His forgiveness.

Not finding people
we think will make
our congregation stronger.

III. Jesus Creates a Community That Sees and Seeks

My friends,

We often overlook.

We sometimes neglect.

Jesus sees and seeks.

Jesus finds.

And Jesus makes us
into a people
who see and seek.
He creates a community
that sees,
seeks,
and finds.

Christ creates community.
Family.
He gathers sinners.
He forgives sinners.
He restores the wanderers.
He puts the little ones
into the midst
of His people.
And then His people learn
to look
at one another
differently.

The little child Jesus places
in the middle
of the disciples
demonstrates need.
You don't get much labour
or help
from a toddler.
A little child needs help.
A toddler is totally dependent
on others.
In the first-century Roman Empire,
little children had no rights.
No social status.
They relied entirely
on their father's love.

The little children
in Christ's Church
are the needy ones.
The ones entirely dependent
on God's love.
The new Christian.
The struggling Christian.
The repentant sinner.
The elderly.
The lonely.
The poor.
The person
with little social influence.
The person
who feels forgotten.
The person
who has wandered...

Ultimately—
every Christian is a little one.
Jesus says,
*"Truly,
I say to you,
unless you turn
and become like children,
you will never enter
the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:3)
All of us are absolutely dependent
on Jesus.
We have no status
of our own.
No merits
to bring
to the table.
Just our need
for forgiveness.

There's no "us"
and "them"
inside the Church.
No "us who see"
and
"them who are little."
Before Christ,
we are all little ones
who need a Shepherd.

The more we learn
to see the little ones—
the more we realize
we too
are little ones.
We aren't the 99
who have earned
the Shepherd's attention.
We are all the lost sheep.
And Christ has come
to rescue us.

Jesus sees the people
the world overlooks.
He is the Shepherd
who seeks the lost.

He found little Zacchaeus
in a tree.
Zacchaeus was a despised man
who couldn't see
over the crowd.
But
Jesus deliberately noticed him.

The crowd tried
to silence blind Bartimaeus.
But Jesus stopped
and called Him.

Even

while dying on the cross,
Jesus finds the criminal
who is the least
of these.

In His death,
Jesus brings him home
to paradise.

And He still sees and finds.

Who have you stopped seeing
that Jesus is pointing out?
Someone who used to attend?
Someone sitting alone?
Someone whose circumstances have changed?
Someone you haven't spoken to
in months?

Who has Jesus placed
in the midst of your path?
A neighbour?
Coworker?
A family member?
A child?
A visitor?
Someone
who doesn't yet
know Christ?

Who needs you to go?
Not to fix them.
Not to recruit them.
Not to make the congregation
more successful.
But to bring them the Word?

Go

with the Shepherd's Word.
Invite them.
Call them.
Visit them.
Listen to them.
Pray with them.
Speak forgiveness.
Bring them
to where Jesus promised
to be.
Bring them
where the Shepherd gathers His sheep
around His Word
and Sacrament.

Conclusion: Welcome, Little Ones

My friends,

We are very good
at counting.
Who is here?
Who contributes?
Who helps?
Who brings people?
Who's important?

But Jesus counts differently.

He sees the little one.
He sees the one
who has wandered.
He sees the one nobody else notices.
And He goes
to rescue them.

Why?

Because it is not the will
of His Father in heaven
that one of these little ones
should perish.

And that includes you.

You are one
of His little ones.

You are a sheep
that needs a Shepherd.

And your Shepherd came looking
for you.

He found you.

He forgave you.

He brought you
into His flock.

And now He gives you brothers and sisters.

Not because they are useful to you.

But because they belong
to Him too.

So look around.

Who have you not seen?

Who has Jesus put
in your path?

Who has wandered away?

Don't despise the little ones.

See them.

Seek them.

Welcome them.

Because your Shepherd sees them.

And through us,

He calls them home.

And to the little ones:

Jesus sees you.

Jesus seeks you.

Jesus has brought you
into His family.

You belong here.

Welcome home.

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
amen.*