Whoever welcomes this little child in my name

Luke 9:46-56

Key Verse 9:48

“Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.”

Happy mother’s day. Mothers are very special people. When we think about our mothers, why are they so special for us? In my opinion they are so special for us because they welcome us and take care of our needs when we are young. Because of their love and care they have such special place in our hearts. There is one story which shows such truth.

There is one Japanese soldier who served during world war II. He is now 99 years old, and he was a famous hero of war. He was a pilot. After the war he became an activist for peace because he realized how horrible the war was. According to his confession, he did not see even one soldier who died saying, “Long live the emperor” although they were educated so thoroughly. All of them died saying ‘Mamma’. Indeed mothers have such special place in our hearts because they welcome us and serve us when we are young.

Now in today’s passage, Jesus is saying ‘whoever welcomes a little child in his name’ is the greatest man. Why is ‘welcoming a little child in Jesus’ name so important’? And how can we welcome a little child in Jesus’ name. So “why” and ‘how’ are the two questions we want to think about today.

 **Part I. The one who is least among you all (v.46-48)**

Look at verses 46-48.

**46An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.47Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. 48Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.”**

According to Luke’s gospel the argument started after Jesus’ teaching of his death a second time. Therefore Jesus could have rebuked them, saying “Why don’t you think about what I just said?” when the argument started. Or he could condemn their desire saying “Are you still so worldly being consumed by your human ambition?” But Jesus didn’t do so. The way Jesus did to his disciples shows how Jesus welcomed his disciples as little children and served them. He said to them, “**“Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.”**

In what sense, was ‘the least among them all who is the little child’ the greatest? He was the greatest among them all in terms of his needs and care. Compared to twelve disciples of Jesus who were adult the little child needed the greatest amount of love and care. So indeed he was the greatest in terms of his needs and care although he was the least among them all.

Now why is ‘welcoming a little child in Jesus’ name’ important? There are two reasons.

First, ‘welcoming a little child in Jesus’ name’ is important because God identifies himself with a little child. Jesus identifies himself with the little children. So Jesus said, **“Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.”**

The man who welcomes a little child is the greatest because he welcomes God who is the greatest among all existing beings. The same truth is well revealed in

**Matthew 25:34-40**

**34“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ 37“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ 40“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’**

Jesus clearly identified himself as a brother and sister of the least of the brothers and sisters. So to welcome a little child in Jesus’ name is important because God and Jesus identify themselves with little children and by welcoming hem we welcome Jesus.

The second reason why it is important for us to welcome a little child in Jesus’ name is because we are all little children. We are all little children regardless of our physical age and spiritual maturity. Think about Jesus’ disciples. By the time we read today’s passage Jesus’ disciples had been with Jesus for 3 years. They saw Jesus’ action, and they heard Jesus’ message so much. They ate and drank together with Jesus, and they learned from Jesus directly for 3 years. But look at what they did. They were arguing about who was the greatest among them all.

The word ‘argument’ shows that they had a hard time to figure out who was the greatest. Why did they have a hard time to find who was the greatest among them all? It is because all of them could see others’ weaknesses so clearly, but they were completely blind to their own weaknesses.

For example, Apostle Peter must have thought that he was the greatest because Jesus paid a special attention to him in Luke chapter 5, and asked him to put out into deep water and let down the lets for a catch. And he was the one who boldly answered Jesus’ question, “Who do you say I am” correctly. He said ‘God’s Messiah’ and he got the perfect score ahead of everyone. So he thought he was the greatest.

But Apostle John did not think so. According to Apostle John Peter could not be the greatest because he lacked stability and faithfulness. He spoke boldly, but he did not keep his words. What good would it be when he did not keep his words. But apostle John thought he was the greatest because he loved Jesus the most, and he was a man of deep thoughts. He thought that the greatest man should be a man of deep thoughts. But Apostle Peter did not think so. Apostle Peter thought that John was thinking too much and he was lacking in action. Great man should be a man of action like him.

In this way each of the twelve disciples could see others’ weaknesses so clearly, but they were blind to their own weaknesses completely. So an argument started among them when they tried to figure out who was the greatest among them all.

What about us? Are we better than the twelve disciples? We are not better. Regardless of our physical age we are all little children. We all need love and care from others. So ‘to welcome a little child in Jesus’ name is so important because it means to welcome us. Therefore when we welcome others we welcome us. When we forgive others we forgive ourselves. When we love our neighbors we love ourselves. To welcome a little child in Jesus’ name is important because we are all little children. Welcoming them means welcoming us.

So far we thought about ‘why is welcoming a little child in Jesus’ name’ so important? Because of two reasons. God and Jesus identify themselves with little children. And we are all little children. Therefore welcome others means to welcome us.

Now let us think about how can we welcome others? According to today’s passage, we can welcome others when we pay attention to the needs of others first. When Jesus’ disciples were consumed by their own desire about who was the greatest among them all they could not pay attention to the needs of a little child among them. So they could fail to welcome a little child in Jesus’ name.

When we pay attention to our needs first we may fail to pay attention to the needs of others and fail to welcome others.

There is a funny story which reveals the truth very well. Two groups of hungry people were there. Both groups had delicious food set up on their tables. One group of people enjoyed food, but the other group could not enjoy it at all. What happened was they had long chopsticks. Their chopsticks were so long that no one could take the food by their own chopsticks. They were same hungry people, and they had same delicious food set up on their tables. The people who enjoyed food were the ones who used their chopsticks to feed others. The long chopsticks were better to feed others. They paid attention to the needs of others because they welcomed them from their hearts. When they did so they were fed too because they were welcomed by others as well. And the kingdom of God came to the table.

The kingdom of hell came to the other table because they tried to eat first, but they could not. They did not welcome others and did not care others’ needs, and they were starving. This is the picture of the kingdom of hell.

So when we pay attention to the needs of others first we can welcome others in Jesus’ name. We can welcome a little child in Jesus’ name, and we can even become the greatest.

Now ‘welcoming’ means ‘serving’. The word ‘welcome’ has a meaning of ‘receiving or accepting’. At the same time it means to provide service. Why welcoming a little child in Jesus’ name challenging? It is because there is a lot of service needed. So to welcome a little child means to provide service for his needs.

**Mark 10:41-45** shows such truth very well.

**41When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,44and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

Here Jesus also taught the paradoxical truth. Usually we think great man has the great power and authority. But Jesus said, ‘the greatest man has the least power and authority. And they are described here as ‘a servant’ and ‘a slave.’ What kind of power and authority does a servant or slave have? The least. Why did Jesus say they are great? Because they are great in terms of their service. They serve others the most. Surely a servant or a slave is not great because of their great power and authority but because of their great service. Indeed those who serve others’ need are great men.

The story of John Lee among also shows the same truth.

We all like John Lee. Why? Do we like him because he had such power and authority? Why do we like him? Because he serves us. He is so humble that he did not mind helping us even for our personal needs. He is humble enough to work hard diligently. Many times he fixes things in our center even after his night shift without sleeping. Msn Philip was so moved seeing him working so hard without sleeping that he wanted to do something for him. We are all moved by him because of his humble service. I believe that was what Jesus was trying to teach.

The story of Dr. Lee shows the same truth.

Late Dr. Lee told me his story. He lost his mother at the young age something like two if I remember correctly. His mother said in her death-bed saying, “My son will be a great servant of God.” During his life what he missed the most was to see his own mother’s eyes. He longed to see her loving eyes of his mother. His life was tough because his step mother gave him a hard time. He had to study English under a blanket because his step mother did not like him studying. That made him long for his mother’s eyes all the more. Anyhow one day he learned the bible from an American missionary a couple of times. Then **John 1:4 struck him. ‘In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.”** For the first time in his life he realized that his life did not come from his mother but from Jesus. So at that time he made a decision that he would become a spiritual mother for college students. He missed his mother so much. So he decided to become a mother for those who need motherly care.

So far we learned why is ‘welcoming a little child in Jesus’ name’ so important. It is because God and Jesus identifies themselves with the little children. And we are all little children. How can we welcome others? We can do so by paying attention to others’ needs first. Also to welcome means to serve.

Now there are two more thing we need to learn in order to welcome a little child in Jesus’ name.

**Part II. Whoever is not against you is for you. (v.49-56)**

Look at verses 49-50.

**49“Master,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.” 50“Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you.”**

This verse teaches us another thing we need to learn to welcome a little child. It is sharing privilege. Apostle John wanted to keep his privileged belonging. His reason to try to stop the man who was driving out demons in Jesus’ name was ‘because he was one of us.’ He did not want to share his privilege.

But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him for whoever is not against you is for you.” When we do not want to share our privileged blessings, we cannot welcome others. But when we share it, we can be the greatest.

There is still another thing we need to learn in order to welcome a little child. It is share interests.

Look at verses 51-56. **51As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” 55But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56Then he and his disciples went to another village.**

When the time came for Jesus to be taken up to heaven through crucifixion Jesus made a clear decision to take the cross. So he resolutely set out for Jerusalem. But on his way he wanted to help people in Samaria because he was going through them. He sent messengers on head to get things ready for him. He probably needed some things for his journey. He also probably wanted to deliver the word of God to them. But the people there did not welcome him. Samaritan people did not welcome Jesus because he was heading for Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews. The Samaritans hated Jews because they despised them. So in return the Samaritans despised the Jews. When they realized that Jesus was heading for Jerusalem they were not willing to provide what Jesus needed in his last trip or listen to him. So they did not welcome him. They only paid attention to the needs of others but they did not pay attention to the needs of Jesus. So there is another thing we need to learn. In order to welcome others we need to learn to look for not only our interests but also the interests of others.

The truth is well revealed in Philippians 2:1-5.

**Philippians 2:1-5**

**“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,2then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus”**

In conclusion, why is ‘welcoming a little child in Jesus’ name’ important? It is because God and Jesus identifies themselves with little children. And we are all little children who needs and care from others. So to welcome others means to welcome us. To accept others means to accept us. To forgive others means to forgive us. To love others means to love us. How can we welcome others? We can do so by paying attention to the needs of others first. And we can do so by sharing our privilege and looking for others’ interests as well. To welcome means to serve too.

One word: whoever comes this little child in my name