

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9)
St. Matthew 11:25-30

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children...'"

Jesus spoke of *these things* and the *wise and understanding* and *little children*. Understanding what Jesus meant when He said these things will help to explain today's Gospel.

First, Jesus was referring to His miracles and teachings when He used the phrase *these things*. They would be things about Himself; they would be Himself. What Jesus was saying was akin to His statement made to the Pharisees: that He had come to heal the sick and the healthy have no need for a physician. Hear Him, also, from the previous five verses:

Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."
(Matthew 11:20-24)

As Jesus was going around Judea and Samaria, He was preaching that the kingdom of heaven was near—in fact, He was standing right there. He was performing many miracles—healing, casting out demons, feeding a lot of people with a little food. He was preaching the Law of God to show people how unworthy and totally depraved they were, all the while offering faith and forgiveness. All of these things pointed to Him as their salvation—"by faith you have been healed," or, "your faith has saved you," Jesus would often proclaim. Still, everywhere He went, people would not repent; everywhere He went He met resistance and rejection.

And that begins to explain the next phrase.

"At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children...'"

The *wise and understanding* were precisely the people who resisted Jesus and opposed Him. They were the people who wanted nothing to do with Him and the grace and mercy He offered. These were the people who accused Him of blasphemy. These were the people who saw no need for Him. These were the people who saw in Him a departure from their status quo and sought to rid themselves of Him. They were the people who thought they knew better; people who, in their minds, were better than this Jesus. They were the people who would not repent.

You know them as the scribes and Pharisees and their disciples. They are the ones who would often try to trick Jesus into saying something that would contradict His teaching. But Jesus knew what was in their hearts. They were the people who brought charges against Him because He was doing something on the Sabbath. But Jesus simply replied that man is Lord of the Sabbath, not the other way around, and taught them by means of the Scripture and the example of King David. They were the people who leveled false accusations against Him, handing Him over to the Romans as a political

prisoner to be executed. They got their way, but it was all part of the Master's plan for their salvation... yes, even theirs.

And it didn't end there. These "wise and understanding" people who think they have no need for Jesus the Christ still exist. These days they're not typically known by the titles scribes and Pharisees, but share many of the same titles and labels that you do: American, Republican, Conservative, among some others like Liberal, Democrat, and Immigrant. You'll definitely find them with labels like Jew, Muslim, and Hindu. Sometimes, even people who label themselves Christian and Lutheran are among that number. Now, that's not to say that everyone in the first contrasting set reject the Christ of God and His message, but they are certainly found among these people. The point is that there are those who do not wish to be bothered by the Law of God and do not want to hear of the Gospel.

But, it is more than that, too. Society today is one that praises the individual and preaches self above anything else. "As long as you're happy," you hear. "If that works for you," is a common phrase. It is a time of being told to look for the answers to your problems within, that you must "find yourself," that believes that truth is relative, such that it doesn't matter what you believe—what matters is that you believe, because everyone's going to the same place anyway. "Being a good person is all that matters, so if you want to believe in this Jesus guy, that's alright, but I don't have to."

Don't just think that this is a problem with other people, though. It is a problem with which you wrestle all the time; you can see someone who thinks they know or are better than Jesus every time you look in the mirror. Have there not been times when you sat in your seat with your arms crossed and with a frown and furrowed brow, as if it was such an inconvenience for you to be here? Or how about those times when you looked around at all the others with the thought that what is being said is exactly what **they** needed to hear (but not you, because you're not as poor and miserable a sinner)? Don't deny that you have ever felt that way at one time or another; perhaps it might even have been this morning. In fact, every time you break a commandment and sin (which, as you confess, is at least daily), you are proclaiming that you don't fear, love, or trust in God (and His Christ) above all things.

But what did Jesus say? "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children..."

If all of those are the *wise and understanding*, then the *little children* must be their opposite. If the wise and understanding are the people who resisted Jesus, then the little children are those who did not. If the wise and understanding are the ones who wanted nothing to do with Him and His grace and mercy, then the little children are the ones who received Him and His gifts. If the wise and understanding are the people who saw no need for Jesus, then the little children are the ones who saw their sin and their need for a Savior, and saw in Jesus that Savior. They are the people who repented and received the forgiveness Jesus was going to the cross to give them.

These are the people like Lazarus in Jesus' parable. (cf. Luke 16:19-31) These are people like Jairus, the Roman Centurion and his household, and the poor woman with the demon-possessed daughter. (cf. Luke 8:40-42a, 49-56) These are people like the paralytic and his four friends who lowered him through the roof. (cf. Luke 5:17-26) These are people like the woman who sought only to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. (cf. Luke 8:42b-48) These are people like the 10 lepers, especially the one who returned to thank him. (cf. Luke 17:11-19)

These people bring nothing to the table. They have nothing to offer Jesus. Yet they need Him desperately. They are on the cusp of hell and death, and they recognize it. Furthermore, they recognize that they are powerless to stop themselves from crossing that cusp and falling into everlasting torment. They are like beggars, helpless and dependent upon someone else for aid. They recognize their heavy burden and difficult yoke.

And that is the life of a Christian! A Christian is a little child who has nothing of his own, but is totally dependent on someone else for their nurture and care. A Christian is like a beggar in that he believes he is a sinner who is totally dependent upon the mercy of God in Christ. Unless God is merciful for Jesus' sake, a Christian has nothing. Therefore, to have faith in Christ is to receive, like a little child and beggar, the Lord Jesus with all His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. That is what it means to have faith like a child!

"At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children...'"

Jesus said,

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

These are comforting words for little children and beggars. These words bring comfort to those who have a heavy burden and difficult yoke. It is the law of Christ, St. Paul says, to "bear one another's burdens." (cf. Galatians 6:2) Praise be to God that the one who gave this law has borne your burdens, trading them for the easy yoke and light burden, and taking them to the cross. The same cross which is foolishness to the wise and understanding, St. Paul says elsewhere, but the power of God to those being saved, the little children and beggars. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

And that is why you are all here, little children. You gather to hear the Law of God, so that your sin may be revealed in you, showing you to be little children and beggars with nothing, completely helpless and dependent upon God's mercy. You know that your burdens are great. But you also hear the sweet news of the Gospel, that Jesus has borne all of your burdens and woes and sins, and destroyed them at the cross. In this act which the world calls foolish, you have an everlasting peace, a peace which the world cannot understand, because your heavy burden and difficult yoke has been borne for you by your Savior, Jesus Christ; because your sin has been taken from you! That is to say, you are forgiven for all of your sins!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.