

Reflections for 19th September 2021

16th Sunday after Trinity

Welcoming the child

One day, when Jesus was talking to his disciples, he did something that must have surprised them. He called a child to stand in the centre of their gathering, so that he could point to that child as an example of what he was teaching them. And the disciples clearly remembered this occasion, because accounts of this event are included in three of the four gospels.

Over the centuries, Christian people have reacted in different ways to Jesus' call to 'become like a child' in order to follow him (Matthew 18. 3, 4), depending on the prevailing attitude to children in the culture of the time. At times, people have been puzzled by Jesus' words, when children were seen as being untrained, undisciplined, and not yet understanding things that matter. At other times, perhaps more recently, people have often thought that Jesus pointed to a child as an example because children are open and spontaneous, inquisitive and playful.

Those are useful insights, but the gospels tell us that Jesus was responding to his disciples talking, or even arguing, about who was the greatest among them. In those days children were not highly thought of, and it has been said that a child in that culture was 'someone with no status and no power'. So Jesus pointed to a child as an example of all those who are not valued, and often overlooked.

Jesus' message for his disciples then, and for us now, is that the way to be 'great' in God's eyes is to serve those amongst our neighbours who are often overlooked and rejected by other people. For Jesus said (Mark 9. 35):

Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all

Revd John Waller

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be the servant of others
as you were the servant of all,
and gave up your life and died for us,
but are alive and reign, now and for ever. Amen.

Bible readings: Jeremiah 11. 18-20; James 3. 13 – 4. 3, 7-8a; Mark 9. 30-37

Story: 'Be Like Me' (based on Matthew 18. 1-5)