

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

*“Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”* Does it seem like we just heard something about that recently? I hope you say, “Yes. In fact, just last week,” for that’s right. And you’ll remember that Jesus said that greatness in the kingdom means being last of all and servant of all after His own example. And it means believing as a little child does, for it’s by faith that we are accounted righteous before God and made beneficiaries of everlasting life.

Jesus again, in the Gospel before us today, uses a child to demonstrate the greatness of faith ... it’s not a mature adult, not a young adult, not a teenager; it’s not a majestic and powerful angel like Michael, one “who is like God,” though they do serve — they are ministering spirits; it’s not an apostle like Peter the great confessor, not John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, come in the spirit of Elijah; it’s a little child that’s greatest — this one probably old enough to walk anyway, not an infant, but one of the *“little ones who believes in [Jesus].”* This child was Jesus’ example of greatness.

Of course, we Lutherans hear the word of God, and we have been trained up to believe it. By God’s grace we do. Little ones, little children, can and do believe in Jesus. He pronounces woe on *“the world for temptations to sin,”* and especially on those *“by whom the temptation comes.”* Indeed, woe to a parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle, teacher or pastor — who steals away this faith by keeping a child from God’s grace. On the other hand, blessed are those parents who bring their children, even infants, to the font of regeneration and renewal where the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them, to the Sacrament where He enlightens them with this gift that brings them to the true faith, to Holy Baptism where He rebirths them into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Again, woe to those parents or grandparents, dot dot dot, who would keep children away from learning more about the faith into which they were baptized — confessed, as you know, in the Apostles’ Creed, a faith in God the Father Almighty, who “has made me and all creatures,” who made us all that we are and gives us all that we have and still takes care of us, who guards us, defends us, protects us; in God’s only Son, true God, begotten from eternity and true man born of the Virgin, who redeemed us sinners by His holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death, who rose from the dead; and in the Holy Spirit who calls us and enlightens us and sanctifies us in the true faith, as He does the whole Christian Church. Woe to those who birth their child anew in Holy Baptism, but thereafter withhold from him or her the Bread of Life. But blessed are those parents, grandparents, aunts who see to it that these baptized children are brought to church, instructed in God’s word, and in this way kept in the one true faith. Our confirmands, children still but

now a bit older, will confess this creedal faith that we all confessed for them when the water washed over them. They will renounce the devil, and all his works, and all his ways. They will make some pretty profound promises of faithfulness.

What can be greater than all this? This is not a righteousness based on the law. These children, who by this confession are becoming young adults, are not thinking themselves great because of anything they've done — not even by making it through Pastor Punke's catechesis class, not even by enduring a nervous examination before the elders. Rather, they are confessing a *"righteousness based on faith [that] says, ... "The word is near [us], in [our] mouth[s] and in [our] heart[s]" (that is, the word of faith that we [have been taught and that St. Paul and the rest of Scripture] proclaim [and that we want to keep close]); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved"* (Rom. 10:6, 8-10).

They are saying today, "we are thankful for the grace given us in our Baptism, and we want to continue in this faith" — by it we are saved. More than that, they are saying, "we want even more. Give us the body and blood of Jesus, that we may eat and drink and be forgiven, that we may eat and drink and be strengthened in this confession and faith, that we may eat and drink and remain steadfast in this faith until we die, that we may eat and drink and live in the hope of everlasting life."

May we all join with them in such a confession, them speaking it before God and His church for the first time, us repeating it afresh having been confirmed ourselves and having confessed it for them in their baptism. Indeed, let us turn — that is, let us repent again of our prideful self-reliance — *"becom[ing] like children."*

By God's grace, let us believe in the Lord Jesus with our heart. And we have good reason to trust in Him. He gives us glorious promises, like that He will not leave or forsake us, like that He who clothes the lilies and feeds the birds will take care of us, for we are of even more worth than they, like that He who commands us and invites us to pray to Him in His Son's name, also promises to give us what we need for our life now and for eternity, like that He who has the holy angels at His beck and call also sends these mighty guardians to watch over us and protect us from the evil foe.

And all this He does out of His Fatherly divine goodness and mercy, that He might not lose even one of those whom He has redeemed by His Son, for this is the very purpose for which Jesus came: *"the Son of Man came to save the lost."* He came as a Shepherd to seek out wandering sheep, gone astray; He came as the

Paschal lamb to redeem His flock by His blood, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world; He reigns now as the Lamb who was slain but who lives in the heavenly places and rules at His Father's right hand in glory.

So, today Kendall, Nevaeh, and Braelyn will confess Jesus as Lord with their own mouths. They will say we trust in Him with all their hearts, not as teenagers or tweenagers, as a little child. May we all, fully assured that "*the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ [will] have come*" to us, fully assured that we will "*have conquered [our foes] by the blood of the Lamb,*" fully assured that we, with our confirmands today, will be considered the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And in this confession and faith, let us all come together to eat of our victory feast, and let us rejoice, for blessed are we.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.