

### 9.19.21 L25P17 Christ's Children

- “Jersey Boys,” first a Broadway musical, and then a movie – if you haven’t seen either of them – this is the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Season
  - In addition to so many great songs of the 60s like “Sherry,” “Rag Doll,” and “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” Jersey Boys tells the story of the lives of the four singers
  - As teenagers the four young men lived in a tough neighborhood where there were only three ways out – join the military, become connected with the Mafia, or become famous
  - After several run-ins with the law, the group, and especially Frankie Valli with an awesome tenor voice, gain the admiration of the local mob boss
  - In fact the mob boss is so impressed, that one day he takes a dollar bill, tears it in half, keeps one half and gives the other half to them saying, that if they ever need a favor just flash their half of the dollar bill to one of his guys, and that will be their ticket to meet him
  - Some years later, after one of the singers not only gets in personal debt to a loan shark, but he also spends the group’s money set aside for taxes, the Four Seasons are in big trouble
  - Threatened with both mob violence and prosecution for non-payment of taxes, they take the torn half of their dollar bill and go to meet with the mob boss
  - He keeps his promise and does them a favor by paying off both the loan shark and the taxes, but Frankie Vallie and the Four Seasons have to work off their debt to him by performing at Vegas
- There’s more to the play and the movie, but this transaction – If you need a favor, here’s your ticket... we need your help so please keep your promise – this transaction is what I what you to think about today
- Granting someone a favor... and then cashing in on that favor is common not only in the mob, but really throughout life
  - Just think about the phrase, “I owe you one!”
    - Someone has done you a favor, and you are in their debt until you have the opportunity to do something for them to even the scale

- It is how much of the world, and much of life works
- We see it in business, and we especially see it among people who are keeping score and trying to get ahead
- And let me tell you something, this is nothing new
- The Roman culture in which Jesus, his disciples, and his listeners lived was filled with these transactional relationships
- In fact, pretty much the only way to get ahead in Roman society was to have a patron with greater social standing who would take you under his wing (and it was almost always a HE in that day)... that person of higher standing would take you under his wing, and help you along but only – BUT ONLY to the extent that you were loyal, and continually honored your social indebtedness to him
- In other words, you had to honor your benefactor your whole life
- Now in today’s gospel reading, oblivious to Jesus once again declaring that he would be betrayed, killed, and only then be raised from the dead – oblivious to Jesus the Messiah who was about to give his very life for them and the world, the disciples were arguing about who among them was the greatest
  - So Jesus called them together and said, “Whoever wants to be FIRST must be LAST of all and SERVANT of ALL. [Mark 9:35]”
  - Then Jesus took a child and put her among them, and said “Look at him! “ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me. [9:37]”
  - But here’s the thing – when we hear this story today, we tend to think that Jesus pointed at this child because he or she was cute, or innocent, or precious
- BUT NO! In the Roman society back then, and our world today, the point is that the child had no power or privilege. The child has no way to pay back the welcome. The child had no dollar to tear in two, give half them, and say “Now that you have welcomed me, in exchange I owe you and will give you a favor”
  - A child then, and a child now, have nothing to give to advance or enhance your progress, or either your professional or social standing in life

- You can only welcome a child without any expectation of reward, and that is what it means to be the kind of person, the kind of servant that Christ calls his disciples to be
- Of course in Jesus we have the ultimate example, don't we?
- Jesus went to the cross to pay the debt and wipe away the sin that dishonors us, and which has embarrassed and caused such deep sorrow to the God who so lovingly created us
- And we are like children – we do not have any way or any means to now repay Jesus Christ for giving his life and paying that debt and erasing our sins
- Instead, all we can do is to live thankfully, and seek to be the kind of children-of-God-servants, who then in turn serve others without expecting anything in return