

Childlike Faith
Matthew 18:1-20

One of my favorite scenes in the non-animated 101 Dalmatians comes near the end of the movie.

Cruella, Horace, Jasper, and Mr. Skinner are all in the back of a paddy wagon headed for the police station. Cruella, covered with molasses and barnyard filth says, “Congratulations! You just won gold, silver, and bronze in the moron Olympics.” After a brief pause, Horace leans forward to ask, “Who got the gold?”

Such a silly question; much like, *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* While Cruella doesn't answer, Jesus does ... kind of. He doesn't name any names. He calls to Himself a no-name, a nobody, a child. That's how children were seen back then. They remain the same today in that they need others to take care of them. They depend on others for everything.

As our children got older we delighted in seeing signs of independence – indications that they were growing up. But they don't start out that way. They count on their parents to give them what they need.

As adults, we cherish our independence. Anyone here looking forward to the day when your kids take

away your driver's license or stick you in a nursing home? ... I didn't think so. We want to hang on so tightly to our independence that it gets in the way of our relationship with God.

Romans 3:23 tells us, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* We agree with the truth of that statement. Every one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But in the back of our minds there is that question, “Who won the gold?” “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Here's what I'm talking about: We all know we have fallen short, but surely I got closer than some people! I know I missed the mark, and I don't claim to have gotten the closest, but surely I missed by less than some people. Surely I have something to bring to the table.

What about this one? You're driving down the highway and a car in your rearview mirror catches your attention. It's closing the gap quickly. You get ready to be passed, while at the same time patting yourself on the back because that guy is speeding a lot more than you are. Who won the gold? Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

There's no communion today, but I spent some time thinking about it this week. Specifically, I was thinking about that first Thursday evening when Jesus instituted His Supper. On the night He was betrayed, He took and bread ... He was betrayed by Judas. You read about it in one Gospel and it sounds like Judas had left already. But then you read another account and you're not so sure. There are some theologians who insist that he couldn't have been there. There's no way he deserved to receive what Jesus was giving.

So, the rest of the disciples did? Judas really fell short, but they only missed by a little bit so they deserve it? No more than any of us deserve God's mercy and grace.

When Jesus said, *unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*, He meant they needed to stop asking, "Who won the gold?" That thinking was leading them in the wrong direction. They needed to turn away from themselves and toward Jesus. A hymn stanza comes to mind: "Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked, come to Thee for dress, Helpless, look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die."

Faith doesn't ask, "Who won the gold?" It acknowledges that we don't bring anything to the table. We come as beggars with our hands out to receive God's good gifts which are ours through Jesus Christ.

On the cross, it appeared that Jesus crashed and burned. It looked like a defeat, but it was truly the crowning moment of His earthly life. The crown people saw was made of thorns. What they didn't see was the sin of the world He had taken on Himself. With their eyes they saw the blood oozing out of His hands and feet. It takes the eyes of faith to see that Jesus' blood was shed for us to pay the price for our sin. God the father is not like a doting grandfather who lets things slide. Sin had to be dealt with, and it was through the suffering and death of His beloved son, Jesus. The price for your sin has been paid in full by your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Do serve the Lord with gladness! We need Sunday school and confirmation teachers. And there are all kinds of other ways to use the gifts God has given you. But don't try to make yourself worthy of forgiveness. You can't do it. But forgiveness is yours! Every good gift God has to give is yours through Jesus. A childlike faith receives those gifts with joy, and says, Thank you. Thank you Lord! Amen