

St. Andrew's UMC
June 29th, 2008
Matthew 10:40-42
"One Of These Little Ones"

If you went into a Starbucks coffee shop for the first time, you would find yourself staring at the menu blankly for a while. You would stand there, blinking your eyes a few times, trying to figure out which one is the small size. You would find yourself confused at the sizes they have: Short, Tall, Grande, and Venti.

You would soon notice that they do not have small, medium, or large sizes. If you ask for a small, they give you Tall. The medium is Grande. The large is Venti. Starbucks went out of their way to avoid naming their coffee small.

There is something about the small size that we Americans feel averse to. We like it big. But we like our pants sizes and dress sizes small, don't we? We used to hear at the Burger King's "Would you like to 'supersize' it?" with the orders of french fries or the water-diluted soft drinks. Until we are hit hard with the rising price of gas, the auto manufacturers banked on the SUVs and Pickup Trucks with fuel-thirsty, large engines. Now they are offering the incentives of thousands of dollars to the buyers, because these gas guzzlers are not selling.

It is not just the consumers who feel preference for the large size, but even The Supreme Court expresses its deference to something large. This week, The Supreme Court Justices struck down as unconstitutional the campaign finance law that allowed the candidates to raise up to three times the normal amount of the campaign fund against their multi-millionaire counterparts who infuse millions of dollars of their own money in the campaign.

So, if you are a multi-millionaire, the Supreme Court allows that you can freely spend your own money to blanket the media with your own political ads in the huge advantage to the opponent who is not as wealthy as you are. What is the implication of this ruling to the democracy that we used to envision?

Then the same Supreme Court this week, put to rest the 19 year old litigation brought by nearly 33,000 plaintiffs who suffered the damages from the greatest oil spill in the US—11 million gallons of crude oil from Exxon Valdez in Alaska—by striking the total punitive damages of \$5 billion awarded by the jury in 1994 down to \$507.5 million. That would be a mere one tenth of one per cent of the original amount. Now some 32,677 landowners, native Alaskans, commercial fishermen, seafood processors and small business owners—as well as lawyers—will share the award money among themselves. It is clear whose side The Supreme Court took, in this battle between David and Goliath. You know now you are not supposed to mess with something big. And if you are little, you do not count—well, maybe a little more than \$400 million which Lee Raymond, the retired Exxon CEO back then, received as severance package.

If the world consistently reveres what is big and large, why would Jesus tell his newly minted disciples that:

“whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple -- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

What is a cup of cold water, and what is one of these little ones to any one in this age? What credit will a cup of cold water get you? What advantage will helping out a nobody afford you? Didn't Jesus learn any lessons in his days? Didn't he know who were the movers and shakers of his day? Why would Jesus stress the point about bringing attention to the little ones?

We know Jesus' parables. It is the one lost sheep, leaving the 99 on the mountain, the shepherd would go after. It is the tiny mustard seed that the kingdom of Heaven is like. It is the tax collectors and sinners that Jesus would associate with. It is not the righteous, but the sinners that he came to call to repentance.

For some reason, Jesus always made it his priority to be attentive to what is little or ignored. Jesus paid attention to little things and insignificant things. Jesus prioritized the rejected, the lost, and the powerless. Jesus even quoted from the scriptures:

Jesus said to them, "**Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'** (Mt. 21:42)?

That is the principle of justice in the kingdom of Heaven . In the kingdom of Heaven , the rejected receive the higher priority than the chosen. So the last will be the first, and the first last (Mt. 20:16). And the power is the name of the game.

Some Christians believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with the political issues. So they focus on individual ethics and behaviors, such as “Love your neighbor as your self.” So they are glad to serve in the soup kitchen in Jesus’ name, but they vote against building the homeless shelters in their own neighborhoods. They support pro-life, care for the children, and uphold family values, but consistently vote down universal health care, and clamor for death penalty. They complain the public schools are ineffective, but they have gutted the source of the funding for the public education, just to name a few.

Politics is inherently collective in its nature, and deals with the selfish interests of individuals. Those who have power use the power to preserve their own selfish interests. And power is the name of the game. The focus of Jesus upon the interests of the powerless ones—the little ones—is profoundly political in its nature, yet devoid of the political rhetoric. The gospel of Jesus Christ necessarily deals with the political issues, because his focus is upon the powerless, the downtrodden, and the voiceless.

Those who oppose any discussions of political issues in the meditation of the gospel as being partisan and extra-gospel, assert that those discussions should not be included in the Christian meditation. They do so, because they have invariably something dear to their interests to lose. They maintain this attitude of insulating the Christian gospel messages from any political implication, and argue that any political element in the Christian meditation is counter to the gospel message of Jesus.

This is what we often hear from them: this is not personal; this is business. When they perpetrate unethical or inhumane practices against the little ones in defense of their own profits, they appeal to this “business” principle of their practices. The flip side of the coin is that you can do anything you want, as long as it is labeled under “business.”

Michael Moore's documentary, "Sicko," for example, is dismissed as partisan and liberal-biased. But its focus upon the powerless is unintentionally *evangelical*—that is, of the Good News. Its focus upon the victims is gospel-like, and follows the form of justice found in the gospels, for it takes upon the powerful on behalf of the powerless, the rejected, and the neglected.

Jesus understood clearly how the "power" operated on the poor and the powerless. Even in the Book of James, the writer talks about the way the financially powerful people treat the financially powerless. The God of Jesus is God of Justice, and it is not just on whose side God is on, but on which side God stands between the powerful and the powerless. God loves to even the playing field.

Do you think that you need to be righteous, in order to be saved? Think again. Jesus made it clear: I came not to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance. There is not one righteous person on earth. Everyone sinned, and fell short of the glory of God, as Paul has declared in Romans 3:23. Even Jesus countered the man who called him, "good teacher": **"Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone (Mk. 10:18; Lk. 18:19)."**

The ethics of the kingdom of God does not depend on the individual righteousness, but on the individual exercise of power. The way one exercises his or her power will determine one's admission into, or ejection from, the kingdom of Heaven. The righteousness in the kingdom of Heaven is known to us as compassion, charity, or *agape*.

The focus of God is always upon the powerless, the oppressed, and the neglected—the abused victims of the misuse of power. That is the Good News Jesus preached. That is the Good News Jesus practiced. That is the purpose of his coming into this world. And that is precisely the reason why he was persecuted and nailed to the cross.

Jesus made it clear to the new disciples that every small thing matters. Everything that we do to the powerless people has the consequences in the Heaven. God is not going to forget what we do to those who are helpless, powerless, and neglected. God will surely reward those who stand on their side. Those who help them will get the helpers' reward. Those who oppress

them will reap the oppressors' reward. God of justice will surely reward them with what each one deserves.

May God reward you richly, as you exercise the justice of kingdom of Heaven in your daily lives.