

Mark 10:13-16

Some people began bringing little children to Jesus so that he would touch them. But the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said, “Let the little children come to me! Do not hinder them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Amen I tell you: Whoever will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took the little children in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Dear children of our heavenly Father. Amen

As we grow older, most of us have put our childhood years in the rear view mirror, and generally speaking that is a good thing. Who wants a business leader who acts like a two year old or who wants someone that hasn't really matured or grown up. But as I was thinking about this, it dawned on me that there are a number of things we can learn from small children such as

- Feel your feelings. Children leave their emotions on their sleeves.
- Be curious and excited. Being inquisitive is how children learn.
- Be fearless. Children jump, climb, fall and get right back up.
- Grow a little every day (even when it's hard).

Well, today we are going to share with you something that we can learn from children that is far more important than the things we just mentioned above. Jesus is going to point out in a very clear and precise way some very important spiritual concepts that have eternal consequences that we can learn from little children. Jesus today is going to hold before our eyes small children and use them as a teaching tool to remind us:

Sermon Theme: God Wants Us to Have Faith Like A Little Child

- 1. This is important news for God's “little people”.**
- 2. This is important news for God's “big people”.**

1. This is important news for God's “little people”

As we meet Jesus and his disciples in the words before us, it appears that they are at someone's house. A large crowd was gathering, made up in part of parents and grandparents and others bringing their little children to Jesus. Now how little were these children? (And this will be important to remember in just a few minutes here.) They were little enough that Jesus was actually able to take them into his arms and bless them. They are little enough that in the account from the gospel of Luke, they are called **“babies.”** There may have been grade-schoolers and kindergartners and preschoolers in the crowd, but most of the children were probably younger, young enough to be carried by Jesus.

But why were these tiny children being brought to Jesus? So that he would touch them. Not so Jesus could act like some politician, pat them, give them a kiss, and smile for a photographer. People were bringing their babies to Jesus so he could touch them and thus give them God's blessing. And there were a number of people who wanted this for their children. At first there were probably just a few. Then a few

more came. Pretty soon the crowd became rather large.

At this point the disciples decided to get control of things. They told the people that enough was enough, and they needed to stop bothering Jesus. In effect, they said to these people, "Go away." We don't know exactly why they did this, but we can make some educated guesses. Maybe they thought Jesus was too busy. After all, he had just told them that he was on his way to Jerusalem where he would be put on trial and put on a cross. At a time like this, he could hardly afford to be bothered by little children, they may have reasoned. Maybe they thought that Jesus was just too great to be bothered by little ones. After all, you don't see the Harvard professor teaching at Kinder Care. And you don't see Jesus, the great Teacher, singing nursery rhymes to babies. Or maybe they thought what we sometimes think when a child makes some noise in church -- that children just create a disturbance for those who can really get something out of the service. Maybe the disciples were worried that people would be distracted from listening to Jesus' words.

You've heard those sorts of reasons from parents and from those who aren't parents. "My children are too young, and they have too short an attention span to get anything out of church." "I don't know why they insist on bringing their kids every Sunday. It's just distracting for the rest of us." Now it's true that children can be distracting. If they stand on pews, crawl under them, walk back and forth between them during church, or sing during the readings, that will probably be a distraction. But the solution is not for them to stay home. The solution is for parents to keep their children quiet and in place during church, and to take them out into the narthex or the cry room if necessary. But we ought not reason that it's "just not worth it" to bring them to church.

If we ever think like that, we ought to remember Jesus' reaction when he saw what his disciples were doing. The reading tells us that Jesus was not happy with them. In fact, we read that he was "**indignant.**" Jesus' emotion may not quite be a par with Jesus with his driving the moneychangers out of the temple, but clearly Jesus was stunned and upset by what his disciples were doing. He said, "**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.**" And then he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and he blessed them.

This must have made the disciples at the same time ashamed and yet astounded. Understand that in those days there were no babies wearing Nikes. There were no Chuck E Cheese restaurants. There were no McDonald's Playlands, and you couldn't sign up your 3-year old for swimming lessons. Little children weren't thought of as worthless, but they weren't considered terribly important.

But Jesus hadn't simply told the disciples they needed to lighten up and start considering the possibility that kids were special. Jesus was saying that God's "**kingdom of heaven belongs to them.**" Simply put that meant that these little babies could have faith in God and be saved. In other words, the babies that were being brought to Jesus, unable to speak even a sentence, could know their Father in Heaven and they knew their Savior, and their sins were forgiven. They had faith. And because they had faith, Jesus lived within them as their loving King.

And that is still true today. That's pretty big news, isn't it? God has worked faith within the hearts of the little ones in our congregation. Think of all those babies who have been baptized in the past years. These children aren't precious to God because they're young and innocent and good as can be. Far from it! These babies were born with the sin they inherited from their parents. All babies including ourselves when we were babies were born and lost in sin.

God could have punished all of these babies them for their sins, and they would have deserved it. But for the sake of Jesus who suffered in our place, God has not punished them, and he hasn't punished us.

Instead he's transformed us. He does this by sending his Holy Spirit to work faith in us through his Gospel found in his Word and in the Sacrament of Baptism. And when a sinful baby is baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God gave them faith and made them children of his heavenly Father and heirs of eternal life.

So when you look at the little children here at Church, you're not looking at a potential believer in Jesus, or at someone who might one day grow up enough and develop enough self-awareness to make the choice to follow Jesus. You're looking at an actual believer in Jesus. You're looking at someone who owns the kingdom of God. God has worked faith in their hearts.

And how does he keep that faith strong within them? How will they end up enjoying eternity in heaven? By being brought to Jesus again and again. He said, "**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.**" Parents (or grandparents, or aunts, etc.), no matter how little or big your children (or grandchildren, or nieces and nephews, etc.) are, do you realize what Jesus is saying to you? Don't let anything get in the way of your children coming to Jesus.

Why did God give us our children anyway? What's the number one reason? If it's so they could have an enjoyable life, then we should put as much time and money as you have into buying them toys and video games and whatever else makes them happy. If it's so they could lead a prosperous life, then let's spare no effort or expense to train them for the best careers possible. But if God gave us our children so they would come to faith in Jesus and one day have eternal life in heaven, then let's spare no effort or expense, let's use our time and whatever else we have to let them come to Jesus over and over again.

Now it's true that there are people who will belittle such actions. It's true that there are people who will say that when a 2-year old folds their hands before a meal, that's just a reflex, a habit. Others may say that when children talk confidently about Jesus taking them to heaven, they've just been brainwashed, because they don't really understand what they're saying, blah blah blah. But who are we to say that? And how dare we say that? Where does the Bible teach that the somewhat limited comprehension and reasoning capacity of children hinders their faith? Certainly not in this text! Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven belongs to these.

And if God has given our children to us so we can bring them to him, that means we need to do just that. We have a responsibility to regularly read and sing and talking about God's Word in our homes. No child is too little for that. As a congregation we let our children come to Jesus by supporting Sunday School and Confirmation Classes as they get a little older. We join together by rejoicing when there are 2-year olds in the worship service with us. Finally, we take our children to church and make sure they're learning what they're supposed to learn from God's book, the Bible.

But isn't that a bit much, going a little overboard, making our children attend church? Shouldn't they be allowed to choose for themselves? Sometimes parents talk like that. "I'm going to wait until my child gets older, and then I'll let them choose for themselves." Or you'll hear them say, "I made them come to church when they were little, but now that they're old enough to stay home alone, I let them decide. I don't want to force Christianity on them." And yet parents who say things like that wouldn't think of asking their children to make a choice if they want to go to the dentist or doctor or not. Dare we place a lower value on spiritual health than on earthly health? Of course not!

But before we spend too much time talking about Jesus' warning to us here in the words, "**Do not hinder them**" let's remember that the greater reason to bring our children is because of God's goodness towards them. Jesus tells us in the reading that little children can believe. So let your children come to Jesus.

Bring them to Jesus to be baptized. Bring Jesus to them by singing songs and telling them Bible stories at home. Bring them to Jesus by bringing them to church and Sunday school every week. There's a saying that "good things come in little packages." Look at the little packages among us today! Isn't it an understatement to call them "good"? Isn't it wondrous that God has given us little ones to love and teach and lead to Jesus? Isn't it priceless when we hear a little one singing wholeheartedly, "Jesus loves me, this I know"?

2. This is important news for God's "big people".

Actually, it's not only important news for little people that Jesus works faith in their hearts, but it's also important news for us big people. For Jesus also told his disciples, **"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** Jesus was talking about how little children are generally ready to accept what they are told by their parents. If you tell a child that you'll take them to Disneyland next week, they aren't going to ask all sorts of questions. They won't say, "But don't you have to work?" or "Do you have that kind of discretionary income?"

In a child's mind, there is no reason to question that. Their parents have spoken, and that settles it. They have a faith or trust that is childlike and holds on to the promises that you make. Similarly, we big people need to realize that the only way for us to become a member of God's kingdom, and then to stay a member of God's kingdom, is to accept all sorts of things that don't necessarily make sense to us now. "How can God forgive someone like me for some of the horrible things that I've done?" Don't even ask. Look to Jesus, and believe. Or maybe we boldly ask, "Why should I make a habit of attending worship and/or Bible class? Can't I get along fine without it?" But if God urges us, his little children to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, should we second-guess him?

The other facet of a child's attitude to which Jesus was referring, and the other way in which we ought to imitate children, is by having an attitude of utter dependence. Babies such as the ones who were being brought to Jesus depend on mom and dad for everything. They depend on mom and dad to feed them, to clothe them, everything.

We need to have that same dependence. The hymn "Rock of Ages" says, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." That's exactly what Jesus means about being a little child and depending on him. We need to come to God saying, "God, I have nothing to offer you—least of all my 'goodness.' But Jesus did the good for me. And on Good Friday he died for me. Save me, Lord."

And that's more than a little important for us big people, isn't it? It is vitally important. Because the world around us and our flesh within us both tell us that if we're going to be with God forever in heaven, we'd better do this thing and say that thing and be this other thing. We sometimes overthink our relationship with God, and overthink what our faith in God. We sometimes get a little too focused on our ability to think and to reason. But by looking at God like a little child, we learn about true focus. Listening to a child sing "Jesus loves me, this I know" we can be reminded what real focus is. We can be reminded of how God has worked saving faith in these little ones. We can be reminded of the simple faith which will allow us become like little children, which will allow Jesus to reign within us. So let the children come. Let them see, let them hear, and let them be seen and heard. Let the children come—for their sake, and for ours! Amen.