**Mark 10:13-16** October 14, 2018

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*Mark 10:13 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” 16And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.*

Dear Friends In Christ,

**Consider the Faith of a Child**

**I. Feed it.**

**II. Imitate it.**

We love children. And even if you aren’t really a “kid” sort of person, you realize children are special. Parents spend a large proportion of their income for about ½ of their working life, on their children. We love to take children or grandchildren on vacations and explore the world. But we also know there are places children should not be. Amusement parks are places specially built for children, yet if you don’t reach the height of the magic measuring bar, you’re not going on the ride. Nor do young children belong in dangerous workplaces. That is self-evident. But in 1924, the Supreme Court struck down several anti-child labor laws as unconstitutional![[1]](#endnote-1) “Back to work, junior!” Finally, after fourteen more years, there were nation-wide laws keeping twelve-year-olds out of factories! We love children, but we realize that there are places where they really should not be.

Those twin thoughts are the setting for our reading. We watch parents bringing children to Jesus. They love their children. They bring their children to this preacher, miracle worker, and so-much-more to be blessed by him. They bring them so that Jesus might simply touch them with those hands that have made the blind see, chased away deathly fevers; those hands that would one day be wounded for the sins of the world—but they did not yet know that. How they wanted Jesus to simply bless their dear children! And he would have, except…

…there were Jesus’ disciples. I don’t know if these guys make you want to laugh or cry. They didn’t think that children should be around Jesus. In their tradition great teachers were not to be distracted by children, especially not at moments like this.

You see, things were pretty tense. The Pharisees had just been testing Jesus, asking poisoned questions, hoping to trip had up. In this case it had been a question about divorce—a practice once considered quite immoral. (Perhaps you have forgotten that just two generations ago in our society adults did not discuss the subject of divorce in front of children.) Jesus had listened to his opponents’ “adult” question and sent them away with their tails between their legs. Now, it was time for the great teacher to teach. Later in the day he would probably have people to heal. He was a busy man. He did not have time for little children—at least that is what the disciples thought. And so there are the disciples are, chasing away mothers with their children. Talk about bad optics.

But it wasn’t just bad optics. ***“When Jesus saw this, he was indignant.”*** Instead of appreciating his disciples’ efforts, Jesus is upset; as the King James majestically states, ***“he was much displeased.”*** Jesus was not an angry man, but he was always upset when people put obstacles between people and him. That is what was happening. The disciples, in trying to serve their Master, were chasing little children away from their Savior. Jesus saw little souls being herded out of God’s kingdom and he gets upset!

Let this be a humbling lesson to us. It can happen, that as we think we are serving God, we can be badly mistaken. Jesus can be ***“much displeased”*** even when we think we are helping!

To appreciate Jesus’ displeasure, let’s think about children. If a father should tell his child that the sky is red, what is the child going to tell his classmates? And they will laugh! If mother should teach her child that 1+1=8, how will that child do in math? Children trust adults. Children are a pliable material that is formed and shaped by the people they most trust. That is why Jesus said in Mark 9:42, *“If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.”* Your words and actions can build or destroy a child’s eternity. So ***“Jesus was much displeased.”***

Have you ever chased children out of a Sunday School classroom? Probably not. But do our actions always draw children closer to their Savior? Do we go to church, but only once in a while, when there isn’t a schedule conflict? Do we tell our children to love one another, then later we verbally tear down our neighbor? Do we send the children to Catechism to memorize the Sixth Commandment, *“You shall not commit adultery”*, but they hear us telling dirty jokes, or watching filthy programming? So many ways we, like those disciples, can chase children from Jesus.

This word speaks not only to parents. Even if you don’t have children in this church, even if you have no children or grandchildren anywhere, children and young people watch you. They see how often the people sitting in the pews around them come to church. They wonder why someone who once frequented God’s house no longer has time for God. Children, whether you like it or not, observe your actions. Your actions are not just about you. As a Christian you belong to a family of believers, and you have a responsibility toward them, whether you like it or not.

We did not want to chase children from Jesus, did we. But because of our sinfulness, we have often given children wrong impressions about God, and what it means to be God’s people. Children are a blessing and a responsibility. God demands that we never be the reason there is distance between Jesus and them. If we are, what did Jesus say? *“It would be better for him to be…”* You know how it ends.

Thank goodness Jesus came not only for children but for adults too. It isn’t just kids who mess up. Jesus invites children *and adults*. He removes the guilt of all our failings as parents and spiritual guardians. What parent isn’t glad to hear that! Who is not glad to hear that just as Jesus loved and died for those children, he also loved and died for those misguided disciples, and for us who have been guilty of spiritual child neglect. How precious is our Savior, to children and adults!

Pray for parents. They have a lot of work, especially in our wicked times! Pray for God’s wisdom to be helpful to Christian parents. And thank God for those who are willing to assist – and I am going to put a special word out there – especially for our Sunday School teachers.

And then remember the children. First of all with baptism. In baptism the Holy Spirit creates faith in the hearts of babies. On Pentecost, the apostle Peter said, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. The promise is for you and your children”* (Acts 2:38-39). Baptism saves children. Then let us continue to feed their faith. After you plant sweetcorn and peas and carrots in the spring, they germinate and have life. But if they do not continue to receive water... Likewise faith comes to life through the water of baptism. But if there is no more watering with the Word of God, that faith can die.

Therefore we need to keep feeding their faith, keep doing what the parents do in our reading, keep bringing the children to Jesus. We do that in church and Sunday School. And we need to do it at home, teaching the habits of daily prayer and contact with God’s Word in devotion time.

It is said that once there was a custom among the Jewish people, a beautiful custom, that a mother or father would choose a special Bible passage for each child at their birth. They would then teach the child to insert that Bible passage into their daily prayers. What made this *the child’s own* Bible passage is that the passage began and ended with the same letter as the child’s name. For example: Catherine and Isaiah 40:1, “Comfort, comfort ye my people.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Or Lloyd, with this one, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” This is just an illustration of things that we can bring children to Jesus.

Let us not just be content with bringing children to church and Sunday School, but let us daily bring them to their Savior.

What do we want to do with a child’s faith? Let us strengthen it.

**II. A Child’s Faith – Imitate It**

In this very short text, Jesus tells us a second thing about the faith of a child. But it is very different. He brings a child very close, he looks at his disciples and says, ***“the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*** The disciples chased away the children. They chased them because they thought children were, well, inferior. Jesus says, “Big people will not enter heaven unless they become like children.”

Now we need to be clear what Jesus says hear. Some people think that Jesus praises children for being so pure and innocent. Any parent knows that’s not true. Any parent knows that children are often no better behaved than adults. In fact, they are often quicker to get angry, fight, try to get out of work, expect to get their way, than adults. Children need a Savior too!

Jesus points out something different. You see it when you tell something amazing to your own child. There is trust. Tell something really unbelievably amazing to adult and they say, “Yah, right!” Tell it to your child and they say, “That is so cool!” They trust. They are willing to put themselves into the hands of another. Jesus praises that humble faith of children: ***“anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child…”***

Let’s look at two other Bible passages that talk about this.

In Mark 9 (verses 33-36), the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest in God’s kingdom. “I can do this miracle. I love to be with people. I gave this much money to that widow.” And then Jesus, *“Sitting down, called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.’ [Then] he took a little child and had him stand among them.”* Jesus says, “Humility is greatness.”

This is just the description of child-like faith we find in Psalm 131. In this psalm the psalmist doesn’t understand everything God does. He has questions. But then he says, *“I do not concern myself with things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul… like a weaned child with its mother is my soul within me.”* The Psalmist describes himself as a child. We might want to describe him as naïve, gullible. No, he is trusting. Jesus says, “Of such is the kingdom of God.”

Jesus does not say, “Act like a child.” He says, “Believe like a child.”

I want you to leave today knowing what a child’s faith is like. It trusts completely, therefore it needs to be guarded, to be protected, to be nourished. And that same child-like faith that looks so vulnerable and fragile, that is the faith that God wants us to emulate.

Consider the faith of a child: 1)Feed it; 2)Imitate it.

Do you have a child-like faith? Do I? Not yet. But you know what, Jesus’ disciples weren’t always dunces, they didn’t always get the answers wrong. At another time, when Jesus challenged them with a difficult teaching they had a prayer that is worth remembering when you consider the faith of a child. Their prayer was this: *“Lord, increase our faith.”* Amen.

1. https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/history-child-labor/ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p.146-147. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)