

## Let the Little Children Come To Me

### Mark 10:13-16

We wanted to take this morning to highlight the importance that Jesus places on children and the priority of the church being an instrument of compassion to needy children. I know this is Mother's Day, but I want to stress that this is *not* just a message for mothers or only for parents. I believe this is a message for every follower of Jesus whether you're a parent or not, whether you're married or single, whether you're young or you're old. The main idea of the message this morning can be summed up in this sentence:

#### ***Jesus challenges us to become like children and to care about children***

And that is true of every follower of Jesus Christ. Here's what's happening in Mark 10. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and the cross is looming on his heart in a big way. And yet in a village in Judea some parents begin to bring their young children to Jesus, so that he might touch and bless them. Even with the cross weighing on his heart, Jesus loves the fact that parents are bringing little children to him, but the disciples decide that they need to run interference for Jesus and they rebuke the parents and tell them to stop bothering Jesus with their kids. Verse 14 tells us that Jesus was "indignant" – the only time he gets angry with his disciples and we'll come back to that in a few minutes.

Jesus rebukes the disciples and tells them; don't stop these little ones from getting to me, because they've got something to teach you about the kingdom of God. These kids aren't an interruption, they're your instructors. You need to learn from them because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these and the only way anyone will ever enter the kingdom of God will be by receiving the kingdom of God like one of these children.

#### **I. Jesus challenges us to become like children**

Now, over the years there has been a lot of debate about what Jesus means when he says *whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it*. Exactly what childlike quality is Jesus talking about?

- We know it's not a child's innocence – even though children do have a wonderful quality of innocence compared to adults, and we want to help preserve their innocence as much as we can, they really aren't innocent by God's standards. Any parent knows that children are born with a sin nature and that sin nature starts showing up pretty young. The innocence required to enter heaven has to be of a purer quality than a child's innocence, so that isn't what Jesus means when he says we need to receive the kingdom like a child.
- We also know that Jesus is not talking about childish-ness. Children do have a childish quality to them and that childishness can be very cute...when it's a child being childish. But there's nothing cute about an adult that lives in a state of childishness. Years ago I got a fb friend request from a guy I went to Bible school with. I remember wondering what he was up to, how he might be serving the Lord, how God had led him over the years since I had seen him. Never found out any of that because as soon as I confirmed his friend request I started getting all sorts of game requests. Over a period of a week I got 31 requests from him to participate in one fb game or another.
  - o 3x he sent me a smile.

- o Several times he sent me requests to join super poke pets and adopt a kiwi koala bear
  - o He began hitting me with virtual snowballs (what's a virtual snowball?) and then he'd dare me to hit him back
  - o He sent me a street light and a pear tree (no partridge) in lil Farm life.
  - o The final straw was when he sent me a **Warm Doggie Hug** and challenged me to send one back to him. I began to hide his requests from that point on.
- Now is it just me, or is there something strange about a guy in his 40's sending another guy a warm doggie hug? It's time to grow up! Jesus doesn't want his disciples to be childish – just the opposite we are to grow in wisdom and discernment. Paul says when he became an adult he *put away childish things!* So the childlike quality that is necessary to enter the kingdom of God isn't childishness.

So what quality of children do we need to imitate? There is one child-like quality that works exactly the opposite in the kingdom of heaven from how it naturally works in our earthly lives and that quality is dependence. As children grow and mature they become more and more independent from their parents – that's natural and it's how it's supposed to work. We have a robin's nest right outside our front door and so we've been able to watch the babies from the time they hatched and were very small. Now they're so big the nest is really crowded and I think they're in the equivalent of human teen years – they just sit their with their mouths open to the sky waiting for food to be dropped in. But the day is quickly coming when they will need to spread their wings and take off to a life of robin independence. That's how it works with children too – we raise them to become independent of us. Successful parents enable their sons or daughters to one day fly out of the nest into a life of independence. So the more mature a child becomes, the more independent he or she becomes from their parents. That's how it's supposed to work.

But here's where the kingdom of God turns natural things upside down: the more spiritually mature we become, the *more* dependent on God we become. We don't earn the kingdom of God, we receive it. We depend on God entirely to give it, or we don't enter it at all. Salvation isn't a cooperative work – it's all God and none of us. Jesus did the work on Calvary to qualify us for receiving eternal life as a gift simply by believing in him. So the CEO of a fortune 500 company needs to receive the kingdom of God as humbly as a five year old child or he/she will never enter it at all. And as we grow as disciples in Christ, we don't become more independent of God, we become more and more dependent on God. We pray more. We trust more. We recognize our need for God more. That's how the kingdom of God works, and how we receive the kingdom of God like a child. If you're not a Christian, God isn't looking for you to clean yourself up enough for him to accept you. He's waiting for you to come to Him in faith and ask Him to save you through the work of His Son Jesus. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You can't earn the kingdom, you can only receive it like a little child. So Jesus challenges us to become like a child.

## II. **Jesus challenges us to care about children**

As I mentioned earlier, there are only a few recorded times when Jesus became angry in his ministry and this is the only time that he became angry with his disciples. The disciples did a lot of bone headed things, but nothing else they did ever angered Jesus. Why? Because they were blocking children from coming to him and blocking children from coming to Jesus is serious business. Jesus cares a lot about children! If you ever doubt that, listen to what Jesus says in Matt. 18:

*“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Matt 18:5-6*

*10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. Matt 18:10-11*

Three things this tells us.

*1. Christians should make every effort to help children to come to Christ*

When Jesus commands his disciples to let the children come to him and not hinder them, he’s calling them (and us) to do more than just step aside and hope kids make it to Jesus on their own. He is calling us to work to help children come to Christ even as the parents were bringing their children to Christ. That responsibility falls first on the shoulders of the parents, but then it falls on us as a church.

I am very grateful for the parents in this church who do labor to help their children come to Christ in faith. On this mother’s day – thank you to all the mom’s who work really hard for the sake of your children. I am also grateful for our children’s ministry and for the Perl’s and Wakefield’s who lead it, as well as all our teachers and assistants. Our CM isn’t just babysitting while the sermon goes on in here. They are teaching God’s word in age appropriate ways to the kids – and I’ve heard several stories of young people coming home from CM and asking their parents to pray with them to receive Christ because God touched their hearts through the lesson and teaching about the Lord. If you’re not involved with our CM and you want to serve in a way that has eternal ramifications, pray about serving in the CM.

And we can all pray for the children we know to come to Christ with a saving faith. We should all be involved in some way in helping children come to faith in Christ.

*2. Christians should be very careful not to hurt or stumble a little child in such a way that hinders them from coming to Christ*

God has entrusted us with the responsibility of protecting our children and the children around us. Sadly, we live in a world that’s getting more and more dangerous for children, because more and more children are being exploited and abused by adults rather than protected by them.

Jesus’ warning is a very serious one: to lead a child into sin, to stumble them, to abuse them, will not be forgotten by God and it would be better for such a person to be drowned in the depth of the sea than to face God’s judgment for what they’ve done.

When I was young, I remember leaving home in the morning with my bike, and me and my friends would be out riding and exploring all day long! No one worried about where I was or if I was getting into trouble. When our kids were growing up, if they were playing outside Janice and I were looking outside to see where they were and how they were doing constantly. Sometimes it was kinda overkill – if we didn’t see them for a minute or two we’d run outside and if we couldn’t find them really quickly we’d start to panic.

When Jesus says that these little ones have angels who always see the face of the Father in heaven, I think what it means is the Father is always checking on their welfare – how’re they doing? What’re they up to? Anything entering their lives that is going to harm them? Lead them into sin?

Church, God has given us – all of us – a responsibility to protect the welfare and spiritual well-being of our children and to do everything in our power *not* to hinder them from coming to Christ in faith.

3. *Christians should be involved with works of compassion to care for suffering and needy children*

This is where the need is so large and out there so far away that, frankly it can seem overwhelming and we are tempted to give up before we do anything. Or what we do seems so little and unimportant. And yet I believe that while we can't do everything – we can all do something!

There's a story you may have heard about a man who was walking along a beach when he came across a young boy who was picking up starfish that had washed up onto the beach and throwing them back into the ocean. When he pointed out to the boy that there were thousands of starfish on the beach, and hundreds of beaches along the coast, that he couldn't possibly make a difference by picking up a few starfish and throwing them back into the ocean, the boy stooped down, picked up a starfish and throwing it into the ocean said, "I'll bet I made a difference to that one!"

**We can't make a difference for everyone – but we can all make a difference for someone.**

In his book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, Richard Stearns tells about a time he was getting ready to leave a small village in India that had been devastated by an earthquake when a woman came up to their car with her young son in her arms. Seeing the desperation in her eyes he looked down at the boy and saw that he had no feet – his legs had been amputated at the knees. Still it was at the end of a ten day multi-village tour and all he wanted to do was get back to the hotel, rest, and get home. He felt bad, but they had helped so many people over the past two weeks, and he couldn't possibly expect to help everyone, could he?

He returned home but he was haunted by the memory of that little boy and his desperate mother. One night he mentioned them to his children and they begged their father, *isn't there something you can do to help?* He didn't know the name of the child or even which village he had seen him in, but he wrote an email to the WV team in India describing him and asking if they could locate him. Two weeks later he received a picture of a six year old boy named Vikas whose legs had been crushed in the earthquake, and a Korean medical team had to amputate his feet or lose his life. Now all he could do was crawl around or be carried by his mother.

Stearns asked if there was anything they could do to help. He would need another surgery and prosthetic limbs – the total cost of the procedure would be \$300. The India team asked, would WV authorize the expenditure of \$300 for this procedure? Stearns wrote back and said no, World Vision will not pay the \$300. Rich Stearns will pay the \$300. He felt that this wasn't something to be met by an institution, but by a person. He said, God wanted it to be personal for me as it always is for Him. So he sent the money.

Four months later, near Christmas, Rich opened an email to find a picture of this boy standing on his new legs smiling next to his mother. When Stearns saw that picture he wept. He had never met the boy, but it had become personal and he hung that picture in his office to remind him that every child is important to God.

Reading books like *Radical* and *The Hole in Our Gospel*, I am realizing that if we as the church aren't involved in ministry and practical care for the hurting and suffering in some form, than there really is a hole in our gospel that we need to work to fill. We need to obey our Lord's command to care for the needs of the poor and needy and suffering and outcasts of the world. We can't do everything, we can't meet every need. We are a small church and honestly we can't do much. But I believe God will bring children to our window, like he did to Rich Stearn's window, and He will move on our hearts to do something and He will make it personal. And there is joy in being a part of His work to help suffering and needy children.

I don't know *how* God might be calling you to respond to this message. That's between you and God.

- a. Compassion – consider supporting a child
- b. STPRC baby bottle drive – I have the privilege of sitting on the board and I know this is a crucial time, but also a financially challenging time. We are in two high schools in the Elmira area. We are opening up, not one, but two new locations in Elmira. One of the buildings we are purchasing and the potential for reaching the community is outstanding. So grab a baby bottle and fill it with change!
- c. Please continue to pray for Clint and Marisa and their adoption and if the Lord puts it on your heart to give financially to help them with the expenses, do whatever the Lord says to do.
- d. I pray and believe the Lord is going to expand our reach and there are exciting possibilities – not just with children, but including ministry to children. Adoptions, and other ministry. I want us to form a missions committee so we can be prayerfully seeking God about a focused and strategic stewardship of the limited funds we have. If you are interested in finding out more about that, let me know and we'll keep you posted in the coming months.

Helen Keller once said, *Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.* When Jesus calls us to follow him, he challenges us to follow him into a world of need and suffering and do something about it. He challenges us to become like children and to care about children, and I look forward to the Lord using us, individually and corporately, to make a difference in the lives of children in the years and generations to come. God won't call all of us to do the same thing – He has a unique call to each of us – but let's all bend our hearts and ears to hear what He is saying to us. Then let's act on what we hear. Let's pray.