

“Jesus and Children”

5/12/19; Mark 10: 13-16

by Rev. Steve Hammond for FBC of Newport, NH

//13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When 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. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.//

—Mark 10:13-16 (NIV)

This is Mother’s Day. And we’re getting back into the Gospel of Mark. Our text isn’t exactly about mothers, but it’s pretty close. Since you can’t really be a mother if there’s never been a child in relation to your motherhood. So these three verses of scripture are about Jesus and his relationship to children. Not as a mother, mind you. Not even as a father. But as Jesus. Just Jesus. And the evidence is clear; the verdict is in—Jesus has a soft spot for children.

This came as something of a surprise to his disciples. They were of a different mindset. They seemed to think Jesus would agree that children should be ‘seen and not heard’ and kept at a distance if at all possible. Kids are messy and unserious and loud. Best to keep them away.

But Jesus had other ideas. In fact, Mark spells out that Jesus was indignant at the very idea of anyone trying to keep children away from him. He had some strong words of correction and then instruction about something his own disciples thought was a minor matter.

1. Listen to the indignation in Jesus’ voice.

//14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,//

The indignation indicates the importance of children to Jesus, to God and to us. And we need to hear it, right along with those first disciples. Maybe Rock Johnson can help you hear it. He put it this way in the Gospel a Mack:

13 At another time one a Josh's teaching sessions took an unexpected direction. It seemed whenever he'd take a break with his teaching, people would bring all kinds a kids ta see him. He was picking 'em up, hugging 'em and acting silly around 'em, while they'd make squealing noises like puppies. As this increased, the disciples started turning away any people who was coming ta Josh with kids. 14 But when Josh saw this, he was indignant, and he let 'em know it. “Oh no you don't! Let 'em come through!” he shouted at 'em. “Let the little tykes come to me!” Then he turned the whole thing into one a his teachings. “You do not want ta forbid them, for the very Kingdom a God belongs ta such as these. 15 I'm telling yuh the truth heuh: you need to be like these kids yourselves if you're ever gonna get into the KOG; whoever refuses ta receive the kingdom like a little child, will be refused entry altogether.” 16 He then picked up the next child with an open embrace, n' they was soon sharing laughter over the making a some undignified noises n' faces. And he blessed 'em all.

---Mack 10:13-16

So what's so important about children? I mean besides the fact that the human race would soon be extinct without them. What's so important in regard to Jesus and the kingdom of God? And in regard to us?

2. A child's ability to come to Christ is central to our ability to enter the Kingdom.

14 //...for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it./*

Jesus sees this quality of faith already in these children. And we know from Hebrews 11:6 we *cannot* please God without faith. Surely this gives us insight into why Jesus would be pleased with the children, just for being children, and why he might be so displeased at the thought of their being kept from him.

But there's more to it than that. There's a crucial teaching here: the Kingdom of God must be received like a little child, not like an adult. If you think you're going to make your way into the KOG by submitting an impressive resume with all your life accomplishments, forget it. Kids don't do that. They don't have accomplishments. They have aspirations that reach to the stars, but any accomplishments they have are pretend.

And if you think you're going to "get to heaven" through your math and science way of thinking—think again. Kids hate math and science. They might be intrigued by the idea of it when it comes to accumulating apples. But their idea of numbers pretty much stop at ten. A hundred is like the biggest possible number of all numbers. And for most children, "you can't get there from here."

But all this is good news. It's good that we have to become like children in order to enter the kingdom of God. Because entering the KOG is a lot like entering a family. And you don't really want to do that through adult means. Just imagine if your children came into your family as little skeptics and cynical, faithless philosophers and scientists. "How do I know you're really my mother?" "I'll eat my peas when you produce irrefutable proof of hungry, starving people in China."

Even when you try to make little kids overly adult sinners, it just comes out funny. It's the key to Calvin and Hobbes. ILLUS: Test Question: When did the Pilgrims land on Plymouth rock? Calvin: "1620." Then he adds: "As you can see, I've memorized this utterly useless fact long enough to pass a test question. I now intend to forget it forever. You've taught me nothing except how to cynically manipulate the system. Congratulations." And then he looks at us viewing the cartoon and says, "They say the satisfaction of teaching makes up for the lousy pay."

The world of children isn't sinless, but it is on a different level of culpability. The principle of "Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing" takes on a whole new dimension with kids. We adults don't have that ignorance to cover our guilt, so we can't be like children that way. But we can be like them in their ability to trust and even admire those who are over them and the world

that is above them. Kids will grow up to realize the world they admired is flawed and sinful. And we are those kids who've grown up. But we are called to still have that childlike ability to believe. Because when we apply it to our heavenly Father and the kingdom of God we will not be disappointed. And you know what? You should take God at his word on that.

Romans 10:11 (NIV) As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Psalms 25:3 No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

3. Listen to Jesus' blessing of the children

//16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.//

As we started off listening to the indignation in Jesus' voice, we now can conclude by hearing the blessing in Jesus' voice toward the children. This is a profound thing for him to have done. Blessings in the Bible indicate, or confer, a favored status with God. This isn't just a "Bless you" after a sneeze. The Greek word behind this blessing is *eulogeó*. From this we get "eulogy." It is reserved for speaking well of someone, for high praise.

Other blessings to note are: All people on earth through Abraham (Genesis 12:3) and fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus (Galatians 3:8-14); Jesus' mother, Mary (Lk 1:42,48); the poor, mournful, meek, hungry, etc. in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10), including the persecuted; those who believe, even though not seeing (John 20:29); and the disciples at the ascension (Luke 24:50); and all believers are "blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3); and we are to be a blessing to everyone, even those who persecute us (1 Peter 2:9; "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.")

Children are indeed blessed and they very much are a source of blessing. I doubt I need to convince anyone here of that fact. But it doesn't hurt to be reminded of it by seeing it in a way unexpected. Or I should say hearing it. And in such a simply way, as is so often with kids.

In earlier in May there was a concert at Boston's Symphony Hall. The orchestra was playing the "solemn and harmonic music of Mozart's Masonic Funeral Music." When it came to its quieter and quieter ending, it finally came to complete silence. "You could have heard a pin drop," the reporter said. "And then, from somewhere in the audience, a young child's voice pierced the silence: 'Wow!'"

Without hearing this yourself, you might think this rude and ruinous of the concert. But you'd be wrong. It was wondrous. For one thing it was obviously a child's voice. An adult voice might well have received an opposite result. And the sound of it was itself filled with sincere wonder. At first the sophisticated audience laughed, but then with just a moment to ponder it broke into applause—surely for both the concert and for the voice that punctuated it.

But that's not even the end of it. Later, David Snead, president and CEO of the Handel and Haydn Society, and the whole orchestra, wanted to know the name of the child. No, he wasn't in trouble. "It was one of the most wonderful moments I've experienced in the concert hall," Mr. Snead wrote. And then he appealed to the parents to email him if they would. Ends up the organization wanted to give their newest fan and his family a copy of the recording and invite them to meet conductor Harry Christophers when he returns to Boston in the fall. [The Wow. ---from MassLive.com, May 10. See also link to update.] <https://www.masslive.com/boston/2019/05/child-yells-wow-at-end-of-moving-mozart-concert-in-symphony-hall-and-now-the-orchestra-wants-to-know-who-he-is.html>

I'd like to have Jeremy play the recording of the end of that concert, so you can hear for yourself what I've just described. (Readers can go to the site through the link provided.)

And that isn't even the end of it. Contact was finally made and the voice belonged to a nine year old boy named Ronan Mattin. He had been taken to the concert by his grandfather Stephen Mattin and they are both from Kensington, New Hampshire. Ronan is on the autistic spectrum and is mostly nonverbal. "I can count on one hand the number of times that [he's] spontaneously ever come out with some expression of how he's feeling," the grandfather told WGBH. The boy had been to one concert before, too. But it was the one on Sunday, May 5th that brought the "Wow" out of him. It put the Wow into everyone there as well, and far beyond.

We need this kind of thing happening all over our world. It's one of the reasons God gave us children and gave them to us in the way that he did. We need children to be opening our world up in their unique way of looking at it and listening to it. The last thing we need is to be thinking they should be kept from experiencing lofty concerts, or from experiencing the love of Christ Jesus.

In fact, we need to have the heart of a child within ourselves if we are to ever say "WoW" to the glories of God in the face of Christ.