

Mark 10:13-16 (NIV-2011)

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

Dear Children of God,

Why do you bring your children to church? I often get asked by parents of new babies if it is really worth bringing their crying, screaming, fussing children to church when they spend most of their time trying to shush them while running them to the cry room. More than a few times, I have had a mom or dad come through after Church and say that that they needed a printed copy of the sermon, because they weren't able to hear any of the sermon with all of the distractions of keeping their little ones in control during the service. Parents of young children tend to do a lot of pew wrestling and engage in a lot of tantrum distraction tactics.

That takes us back to the question, Why do you bring your children to church? For that matter why do we have a Lutheran Grade School or Sunday school program for children? Why do we take the risk and invite a whole group of children up to the front of Church in the middle of a worship service for a children's sermon? Why do you have family devotions with children who are sometimes less than attentive? Why do you say bedtime prayers with people wearing superman pajamas when a new episode of your favorite TV is on?

Today these few short verses from Mark are going to answer those questions for us. Today we are going to see that not only does Jesus himself tell us to bring children to him but He holds them up as an example for us. Today Jesus tells us to have faith like a child. To understand what Jesus means let's ask ourselves the question,

Sermon Theme: Is Our Faith Childish Or Childlike?

- 1. Many times our faith is childish**
- 2. Saving faith needs to be childlike**

Our lesson takes place as Jesus was making his last trip to Jerusalem. As thoughts of suffering and death no doubt swirled around in his mind mobs of people swarmed about him. Over the last three years Jesus' popularity among the people grew. Feeding 4 to 5 thousand people at a time gets you the reputation of someone who is compassionate. Healing sick and lame lets people know your compassion has power. So it is no real surprise that we read in verse 13, **“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.”** What faith and trust these parents had in Jesus! They did not bring their children because of some sort of ominous obligation or silly superstition. They simply wanted Jesus to

bless their children. They knew that Jesus was a compassionate man they knew Jesus' compassion had power. They knew Jesus was not only their Savior, but that he had also come for their children. They loved their children so they went to great lengths to give their children what they needed most—the blessing and love of their Savior Jesus.

In contrast to this beautiful scene is the ugliness of the disciple's attitudes. In the culture of Jesus' day children had little stature. No legal status, their "worth" was only measured in potential - what value they could offer in future labor. If a father did not pick up the infant, that infant was rejected by the father and had no status. Child sacrifices were commonly practiced in the pagan world. Apparently the disciples did not think these children were worth the Son of God's time. After all Jesus was now an important Rabbi and did not have time for mere child's play. Or maybe they thought this was adult time for adult conversations that simple children couldn't really understand anyway. We are told **"the disciples rebuked them"** – how dare you bother Jesus with this! They mistakenly saw themselves as gatekeepers – none shall pass!

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."** Jesus observes the childish behavior of the disciples. He watched as they stomped their little disciple sandals on the ground and said "Mine!" Grown men who had no idea how to share? Earlier they didn't want to play nicely with another believer because he wasn't part of their click. Now they pitch a fit when someone suggests that they should sit at the kid's table. Jesus sees this childish display and becomes **"indignant."** The only other time Mark tells us Jesus became that angry was with the hard hearted Pharisees. And this is the only time that this strong word, indignant, is used to describe an emotion from Jesus. Jesus is not happy with the childish behavior of his disciples.

He is not exactly thrilled with yours and mine either. Sometimes I think we regress into the "Mine!" mentality. We can be tempted to forget that salvation is a gift. We can be tempted to look at people who are not as smart as we are, not as wealthy as we are, not as socially adjusted as we are, people that are simply not as good as we are... we can be tempted to look at them and think the church has better things to do with her time then mess with people like that. Jesus has every reason to be indignant with us as also.

Jesus was clear with his disciples, **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."** And Jesus is clear with us. He told us to make disciples of all nations. And all means all. Jesus called prostitutes and tax collectors to repentance and so shall we. Jesus called foreigners to faith and so shall we. Jesus rejoiced when a once pagan politician confessed his faith and so shall we. And here Jesus included little children in his plan of salvation and so shall we. The blessings Jesus has to offer are for all people. For God so loved the world and so shall we. ...For our childish faith we ask forgiveness.

Jesus continued, **"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** Instead of a childish faith Jesus encourages a childlike faith. Mark uses a word that describes a child that is still developing their cognitive skills. In Luke's account he uses the word for infant. A childlike faith is a simple faith. It does not require a mastery of dogmatics. A child like faith is a humble faith. Its little arms stretch upward. A child like faith is a trusting faith. If I tell my child I will always take care of them they don't ask for proof, they trust me because I'm their parent. A child like faith is a thankful faith. A child does not earn or deserve what their parents give them so they are rightly thankful for everything. Jesus instructs us to have a childlike faith.

Jesus attaches a blessing to this childlike faith. **“And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”** Just over the horizon loomed the dark shadow of the cross. Jesus’ mind must have been filled with the thoughts of what his last visit to Jerusalem would mean. Yet, with the smile of love on his face, He wrapped his arms around them one by one and blessed them. No doubt the process lasted a while. But Jesus’ loving heart couldn’t help but take the time to embrace such childlike faith. He can’t help himself from embracing you either. The cross no longer looms on the horizon for our Savior. That dark hour that demanded a payment for our childish sins has come and gone. Jesus has died to forgive your sins. He rose from the dead ascended into heaven and now rules heaven and earth to provide blessings for you. One day he will call you to come to him in the kingdom of God. With childlike faith you simple, humbly, trustingly, and thankfully know that to be true. Be the work of the Holy Spirit you have a childlike faith. That is why you sing, “who so happy as I am, Even now the shepherd’s lamb? And when my short life is ended by his angel hosts attended, He shall fold me to his breast, there within his arms to rest.”

Jesus love for us and for our children is why we come to church and it is why we bring our children to church. It is why we have Sunday school, children’s sermons, devotions, and bedtime prayers. For those of you still struggling with little ones and for those of us tempted to exclude some from the blessings Jesus has to offer, let’s focus on Jesus. Jesus’ blessings are for all people of all time. In your mind’s eye see Jesus taking the time to stoop down and wrap his arms around the loudest crier and quietly blessing the most obnoxious screamer. And then realize that Jesus does the same for you. God bless you children one and all with a childlike faith. Amen