

## Scripture and Sermon 6 October 2024

### Scripture: Mark 10:13-16 New Century Version

<sup>13</sup> Some people brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch them, but his followers told them to stop. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw this, he was upset and said to them, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to people who are like these children. <sup>15</sup> I tell you the truth, you must accept the kingdom of God as if you were a little child, or you will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup> Then Jesus took the children in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**Thanks be to God.**

### Message: Being Like Children

One of my favorite pictures is one that I have of Jesus and children. Jesus is smiling and there are a variety of children. It looks like a good time is being had by all. This laughing, light-hearted, friendly, joy filled portrait is one I believe many of us prefer to keep close to our hearts when we think about Jesus. It is certainly a more accessible Jesus for me than Jesus upon the cross, or Jesus praying so hard that drops of blood form in the Garden of Gethsemane, or even Jesus arguing with the Pharisees or teaching the masses. This smiling Jesus surrounded by children is approachable in a way that Rabbi Jesus and Crucified Jesus is not. Am I the only one who feels this way? Maybe this is why we love this story about Jesus so much. We can relate. We feel like the children in the story, or the parents bringing the children to be blessed by Jesus, because, I mean, if any of us heard Jesus was going to be in the town square, we would all come and bring our children and grandchildren for Jesus to bless, wouldn’t we?

And we are also used to being called the beloved children of God. So, the picture of Jesus calling the children to come to him to be blessed resonated in my soul as a call to me to run into Jesus’s arms to be blessed. I can almost feel it. Can you?

The joy. The wild abandon. The knowledge that no matter what, Jesus’s arms will catch you and hold on to you. Protect and bless you. I can connect this feeling of utter safety with a childhood memory. I may have told this story before.

When I was really young – preschool or kindergarten – a couple of families from the neighborhood all went shopping together at the mall. My dad was tasked with watching us kids while the moms all went into the anchor store to shop the bargains. I think it must have been between Christmas and New Years if my Dad was the only dad there. Anyway, my Dad got out his trusty book and proceeded to mostly ignore us children as we played around the mall fountain. Follow the leader and stuff. But, of course, I fell in.

Now we had been told not to fish out the coins in the fountain or the police would get us for stealing – and I was convinced that because I was now sitting in the fountain, the police would think I was stealing, so I started crying and climbed out of the fountain – dripping wet – and right into my Dad’s lap. Who was trying not to laugh and trying not to let me drip on his book and trying to figure out why I was crying. But he held me in his arms, and I knew I was safe and protected – even though I was dripping wet. I picture Jesus and God the same way – holding onto us – even when we are dripping – protecting, hugging – helping us to feel safe.

Beyond the question of Jesus and God holding on to us as though we are little children being blessed, Jesus goes on to say – to tell the disciples that in order to enter the kin-dom of heaven, we need to be like children. What does that mean? Lots of ink has been used to try and explain this statement. What does it mean to be like a child? How do children receive things? And how do we emulate them? Words like *innocence* and *purity* or *dependance* or *wonder* are often used to help us grasp the attitude it takes to receive

the kingdom. But I wonder if it isn't about an attitude, but an action. Attitude is important; I don't mean to suggest that it isn't. Yet, Jesus is being concrete here, grounding us in the world of doing. So maybe his point is more earthy than we tend to think. Simpler. So, how do children receive anything? With both hands. With their whole bodies and minds and spirits. Children receive with their whole selves – holding back nothing until the world teaches them differently.

Maybe this is what Jesus is trying to teach the disciples and us with these actions – with these words. Because there is a reason Mark puts this story here. This chapter in Mark is directly after the place where Jesus starts his final journey to Jerusalem and the cross. The next chapter begins at Holy Week, Palm Sunday and the Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This is the last journey with the disciples, the last chance to impress upon them the important things Jesus wants to teach – wants the disciples - wants us to know. And Jesus teaches through simple earthly things – things we can touch, taste, hold in our hands – like fish and stones. Jesus seemed intent on making things, making faith, real. He was grounded in the reality of the world in which we live. His images of the kingdom and the metaphors he used were of earth - seeds and pearls, light and darkness, sheep and coins, the stuff we live with every day.

It was a trait of Jesus, issuing an invitation to pay attention. He was always pointing to the most unlikely things and the most unlikely people and asking us, his followers to see them, to really see them.

It's World Communion Sunday this week--a date when we remember that when we partake of the sacrament of Holy Communion, we don't do it alone. This meal we share is not for us alone. The ritual is performed in more languages than we can count; the bread takes many forms and flavors. The celebrants come in all colors and answer to a variety of titles. It's a World Communion observance in a diverse and divided world. And it's a world with needs as real as bread and hungers as deep as the ocean.

Here's a question – “Is Communion primarily a spiritual event or a physical one?” Do we come to the table for something spiritual, and unseen, or do we come to the table for a taste of bread and grape juice. A friend of mine recalled communion in the church of his childhood as the mid-service snack. He thought it was pretty cool that everyone got to have a snack in the middle of the church service. As a child, this grace was almost purely physical. But as adults don't we lean to the spiritual side? Sure, there is bread and juice, but it is the grace and the remembrance that really make it Communion. Our task on Communion days is to experience the presence of Christ, isn't it? It's our task to transport ourselves onto a spiritual plane and commune with the one who set the table. We're to move beyond the mundane to enjoy the sublime. Right?

Well, maybe it's a bit of both. Maybe we can learn to think like a child. Maybe Jesus was sitting at the table and he took hold of the reality of bread and said, “This is my body. This is me. I'm here, I'm as real as bread. And every time you pick up a loaf of bread, you'll be touching me, holding me, claiming me. I'm here, right here in this world with you.”

Maybe Jesus wanted people grounded, not floating around on some heavenly cloud somewhere. And when the disciples tried to turn the talk to the reality of the kingdom, asking about the seating arrangements and the place cards on the table, Jesus got exasperated with them. “This cup,” he said, “this cup is my whole life. I'm as present as the clay it took to make this cup. I'm as alive as the bouquet of this wine, the fruit of the vine. I'm that vine,” he said. He was trying to get his followers to live in the world, to pay attention to what was right in front of them, like children.

So, this morning, how shall we receive communion? How shall we receive the kingdom? Like children. With both hands. With all our senses. With our whole selves. Come, we are invited to receive and be received by Jesus. Come and feel the arms of God surrounding you. Come and receive this morning the blessing Jesus wants to give to you. Come to the table.