**September 26, 2021 Mark 10:13-16**

***More Than Child Friendly***

**Scripture:** Mark 10:13-16 NRSV

*(13)People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. (14)But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (15)Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." (16)And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

**Notes:**

1. This passage throws light on the character of ***Jesus***.
   1. Jesus ***loved*** to be around children.
   2. Jesus must have smiled ***easily*** and laughed ***joyously***.
   3. Children must have been ***attracted*** to him.
   4. I can see Jesus ***smiling*** with the children in our story today.
   5. Jesus’ love for these children was ***passionate***, and ***emotional***.
   6. Children need protection from ***bumbling*** ***adults***!
2. The disciple’s treatment shows us another side of Jesus as He ***defends*** the children.
   1. ***Indignant*** means anger has erupted into hostile action.
   2. Jesus and the ***money*** ***changers*** is the Jesus we find here.
3. Jesus Christ is a ***champion*** of children.
   1. That which harms children ***offends*** God, to the point of ***provoking*** him into ***hostile*** action.
   2. Jesus does not elaborate on what these ***qualities*** are; He leaves it up to us to try to discover them.
4. JESUS WAS ***CHILD***-***FRIENDLY*** … ~~THIS~~ **HIS** CHURCH SHOULD BE TOO!
   1. Our church should be a place where children are ***safe***.
   2. Our church should be a place where children are ***welcomed***, ***blessed***, and ***loved***.
   3. Our church should be a place where children ***meet*** with Jesus and come to ***know*** Him fully.
5. If a church is to be about the business of ***discipleship***, then we must start with children.
   1. We should be ***embodying*** God’s ***love*** in how we interact with them; at church, in the community; and in public.
   2. By watching Jesus we see God’s ***demeanor*** and ***attitude*** towards children.

**Script:**

Today we have made a commitment. In many ways it is the same commitment that our parents made when they conceived and gave birth to us. They committed to do their best to raise us right. Raise us to be good, upstanding, contributing members of the world. But my parents committed to something more; that my brother and sisters as well as myself would be raised to know God and trust in him for all my needs. To do that I was at church at least three times a week as a child, Sunday morning for Sunday School ad church, Sunday evening for the evening services, and Wednesday evening services; which consisted of children’s programs that included programs like caravan and quizzing. It was tough for me growing up because there were times when my parents were leaving for church on Sunday evenings and the wonderful world of Disney was just beginning, I felt as if I was being dragged out of the house. Then on Wednesday evenings there were school activities that went on, including sports; I liked to play me some football or baseball, but I had to go to the church.

Some of us here today were probably a lot like me. When the church doors were open we were expected to be here. Our parents took our religious training seriously and made sure we were here to learn about Jesus, to learn about God, to learn about the Holy Spirit, and to learn about how to live a Christian life. Some of us excelled at this and others not so much. But there were always the people out there to encourage us, those who were waiting for the Spirit of God to get ahold of us and change our outlook on why we were at church.

Some people are just waiting to see faith make a difference in the lives of children. Some people are just waiting to see faith make a difference in the lives of us Christ followers as well. They want to see it work. They are not asking too much. As God’s Spirit is allowed to inform and transform it builds trust in those watching.

In Mark 9 Jesus began to show us that discipleship expresses itself through relationships. To g9ve an example of that type of relationship, last week we talked about Jesus teaching us that we need to become like little children in order to be the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. In chapter 10 that theme is extended into more complex relationships that include elements of society. Mark 9:50 serves as a good transition between the two … it hits the nail on the head. Mk 9:50 *“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”* One such relationship that we read about is the relationship between Jesus and children. As we look at our passage in Mark 10:13-16 we see a relationship that truly is at its purest; the relationship between God the creator and Humanity, his creation. ]But we see this in the forms of Jesus and children. Turn with me and join me in the reading of Mark 10:13-16.

*(13)People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. (14)But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (15)Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." (16)And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. Mark 10:13-16 NRSV*

Jesus was more than Child Friendly; one could say that he promoted being childlike and loved children because of their innocence and their eagerness to love and be loved. I read a story this week of a Pastor, from our district, who made a profound discovery, and it involved the attention given to children. A few years back while attending the District Assembly a pastor and his wife were walking down a hallway on their way to an ordination service. The pastor was dressed in his best black suit; all prepared to be part the Ordained Ministers Choir and one of the supportive pastors who lay hands on the ordinands during the prayer time. As they walked down the hallway, they passed the nurseries. One was for infants and one was for toddlers. For all I know my son Stevin could have been in there.

Anyway, have you ever noticed that nurseries never have enough workers. The pastor paused for a moment, looked at his wife and said, “I’m gonna work the nursery instead of going to the ordination service.” He walked in the toddler nursery door, introduced himself (still in his best black suit), and asked if they needed help. Within moments he was registered and ready to go.

He didn’t know what to do so, still in his best black suit, he walked to the center of the room, looked at all the little guys and gals scooting around, and sat down in the middle of the floor. It was remarkable. Like magnets many of them began to gravitate in his direction. Little girls sat on his lap and played with plastic blocks and little boys climbed on him like he was a jungle-gym. This went on for two solid hours!

When his wife came back to pick him up after the service, he was exhausted; yet at the same time he was exhilarated! He shared with his wife that he had saw Jesus that night, right there on that floor in his best black suit. He saw Jesus in the eyes and presence of each of those little toddlers.

Today’s passage in Mark has been appropriately referred to by some as the Magna Carta of the children. It gives us clear insight into Jesus’ opinion of children. It shows us God’s approach, our God in the Flesh’s approach, towards children. Children, like wives, were considered property and without rights. They would have been considered part of the marginalized people of that day and age, and underprivileged of society. To say they were treated as unimportant would be a gross understatement.

But this passage throws a flood light on the character of Jesus … the character of God. First and foremost, Jesus loved to be around children. So many times, we imagine Jesus as being all about the business, never smiling always as serious as could possibly be; but these paradigms and the images we have burned in our memory of our savior are sometimes misconstrued by the stereotypes of our own imagination. Contrary to popular belief, Jesus must have smiled easily and laughed joyously. Children must have been attracted to him. Let’s face it, children can be a pretty good judge of character. They seem to be able to look into the eyes of an adult and sense reason to fear or reason to be at peace. They seem drawn to people with pure hearts. I have watched and seen children as they are naturally drawn to children’s ministry workers. I have seen children’s pastors at children’s camp, with kids flocking to them, hanging off of their arms and legs, because of their pure hearts. It’s a beautiful sight!

And right now, I can see Jesus smiling with the children in our story today. I can see Jesus playing with children because he was pure in heart and children could sense it. If you can’t see Jesus doing that then you need a new understanding of who Jesus is and what he came into this world to be! IN fact I can Jesus smiling with delight over the children, we have dedicated this morning; along with their parents, and this congregation, because we made a vow a commitment to do our best to help raise these children to know Jesus and love Jesus with all of their heart.

This story that we read today is beautiful. We are able to see the innocence of the children and Jesus. And, did you notice what the parents, did you notice what the parents were wanting? They just wanted Jesus to touch the children and consequently to bestow a small blessing upon them. But Jesus wanted more! It tells us that he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. That word blessed means “blessed fervently”, with passion and enthusiasm. Jesus hugged them and loved them. I’ll bet he even played with them! Jesus’ love for these children was passionate, open, and emotional. That’s how you bless a child.

The disciples, however, did not want Jesus bothered; they could not conceive of a reason why Jesus would entertain children. They thought that Jesus needed protection from bothersome children. But what Jesus points out is that the children needed protection from bumbling adults! To Jesus the children were no effort or burden, they were a delight, a simple and pure joy.

The disciple’s treatment of children shows us another side of Jesus as He defends the children’s cause. The word indignant does not mean mildly irritated or slightly angry. It is a violent word. It is a word that means anger has erupted into hostile action. It is probably intended to stand in contrast, the complete opposite of “Blessing fervently” in this story. Both are done with significant passion. Do you remember how Jesus acted when he removed the money changers from the temple? That’s a picture of someone who is indignant, and that is the Jesus we find here responding to the disciples.

What can we learn from this passage today? Foremost I would say that Jesus Christ is a champion of children. That which harms children offends God. It offends God to the point of provoking him into hostile action.

* God stands in condemnation of cultures that will kill a child if it is a girl or to stay within a quota.
* God stands in condemnation of cultures that use children for slave labor and barely give them enough food and water to exist while working them 20 hours a day.
* God stands in condemnation of cultures that condone and practice abortion.
* God stands in condemnation to cultures, parents, and systems that neglect and abuse children in any of a myriad of ways.

Jesus seizes the opportunity that exists to teach his disciples what characteristics they are supposed to exhibit. And when I refer to the disciples I am not speaking of the 12 chosen to be apostles, nor the hundreds who have followed him throughout his ministry, but those who read scripture and hear his word proclaimed. In Verses 14 and 15 Jesus says, “… *for 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*.”

These are interesting words. Scholars have had a field day trying to discern what these qualities might be, they have guessed to the best of their abilities, but Jesus does not elaborate on what these qualities are; He leaves it up to us to try to discover them. I want to suggest only one application that can safely be drawn from them though… JESUS WAS CHILD-FRIENDLY … ~~THIS~~ **HIS** CHURCH SHOULD BE TOO!

1. Our church should be a place where children are safe

We have put into place practices to protect our children, not just the ones who regularly attend, but also those who come with others, those who visit, and those who may be here for the first time. No child should ever be at risk when they are on this church property, or in the presence of its members.

1. Our church should be a place where children are welcomed, blessed, and loved.

How many times have I said that I love a sanctuary full of children? I love to hear them responding to the songs we sing, the messages that are declared. I am blessed when they are not afraid to speak up and request prayer for a friend, a grandparent, or even a pet; because, this shows that they are getting it, when you have a need, you take it to Jesus; and we represent Jesus to these little ones. Which takes me to number 3.

1. Our church should be a place where children can meet with Jesus and come to know Him fully.

I have often said that we are the only Jesus many people will ever see. This includes the children we encounter here as well as in our communities. We must go out of our way not only to show them kindness and compassion, but also love them, cherish them, and even some times, when needed correcting them.

I am not sure if I ever told you this but I want you to know that if a church is to be about the business of discipleship, then there is no better place to start than with our children. They should get the cream of the crop when it comes to ministry and energy. That is why we have programs for children on Wednesday nights, why we hold our children’s events such as VBS, Easter Egg Hunt, the Nature Walk, the activities where our children get together in fellowship. I love to walk around and see our adults on the floor teaching and playing with the kids. I get a blessing out of watching Jan share the easter story with those who attend the egg hunt.

I am grateful for those who do the planning and sometimes thankless work with our children and teens of this church. God takes note! He sees those of you who put up with the background checks and training so that you may work with the children and help to ensure their safety. God sees those of you who send a welcoming word of encouragement and show interest in the young people of this church and our community. God sees those of us who demonstrates the love of Jesus to our young people and helps to teach what a Christian life is like, not through words but through actions. Remember this; knowing that God loves children so much then we should be embodying that in how we interact with them; at church, in the community; and in public. If we are to truly deserve to think of ourselves as the family of God, then children must be a central part of what is going on. By watching Jesus we see God’s demeanor and attitude towards children.