

“Receiving Like a Child”

Liturgical Date: Proper 22 (B)

Primary Text: St. Mark 10:2-16 (focus on 13-16)

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, is the Gospel Lesson from St. Mark Chapter 10-with a particular focus on verses 13-16. The title of today’s sermon is “Receiving Like a Child”. JESUS LETS THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO HIM AS SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Today we heard Jesus teach on marriage and divorce, but I want to focus on verses 13-16 where we see Jesus in one of the most well-loved scenes of the Bible. It is also given for us in the parallel passages of St. Matthew 19:13-15 and St. Luke 18:15-17. He welcomes the children unto Him. We all probably have this vision of our gentle and loving Savior taking these little ones in His arms and sitting them on His lap right about now.

This event is the third time in as many weeks that we have heard Jesus speak favorably of children. In St. Mark 9:36-37 Jesus used the example of a child in His arms to illustrate greatest in the Kingdom of God as He taught about servanthood. In verse 42 last week we saw Jesus saying that if anyone caused a little one who believes in Him to stumble then it would be better if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea. Jesus welcoming children fits very well in the context of this text as Jesus had just taught on marriage and divorce and marriage generally involves children and divorce impacts children. We can conclude that Jesus loves and values children greatly.

In verse 13 we see that it says, “they brought young children to him, that he should touch them.” While the “they” are not specifically named here, we can safely assume that these were the parents of these youngsters bringing them to Jesus. This was in Judea, so likely these were primarily Jews who knew the Old Testament practice of the laying on of hands for a blessing. No doubt they had heard of the great power and miracles Jesus had performed through His touch. Matthew also tells us that those bringing the children to Jesus wanted Him to pray for their children. In verse 16, we see that Jesus does exactly this by laying His “hands upon them, and blessed them.” We continue this practice today as when children who have not yet been confirmed come to the Communion rail, they receive a blessing from the Pastor in the stead of the Lord Jesus.

It is what happens between the second part of verse 13 and through verse 15 that is particularly interesting. You might think that the 12 Disciples who witnessed this act of love would have thought, “Isn’t this great that the Lord is taking time to receive these children. These children are so precious and cute.” Wrong! Despite Jesus’ teaching about the importance of children not long ago, the Disciples once again don’t get it. The disciples rebuked the parents who were bringing these children. Perhaps they were thinking, “We have important things to do and this is wasting our time. Jesus should be finding some more important people like Pharisees to debate with rather than being bothered by these children.” But Jesus does not concur with their rebuke. In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus was very displeased or “indignant” toward the Disciple’s rebukes. Remember that Jesus became angry at times, a righteous anger that was not sinful, but angry none the less. They don’t get it! The disciples just like in 9:38-42 when they tried to stop someone from casting out demons in Jesus’

Name that was not one of them are again trying to “close the circle” around Jesus. Jesus is always expanding that circle.

But can we do this today? Sometimes we view children (especially other peoples) as hindering, hampering, or annoying. We have important things to do after all! This can be true when it comes to church as well. Let me state the obvious. Children will make noise and fidget some during an hour-long church service! In some churches it seems children are not that welcome because they might disturb the adults. It is as if we would be disturbed by the horrific sounds of children learning to worship and follow Christ. Let me be clear-children are welcome here even if they make some noise from time to time. In fact, the sounds of children in the congregation are a sign that it is healthy and will exist in the future! Now, we do use common sense. If a child is throwing a tantrum or being so loud that people can't hear, a responsible parent will remove the child until he or she quiets down. We have a nursery for this purpose. And this does happen at times (example of Raegan-don't hurt me).

Over the years, some of you have shared experiences in other churches where children were not made to feel welcome. Things like ushers “bouncing” parents and kids that were too noisy or icy stares from other parishioners. This makes me sad to hear, but also happy to know that this is not their experience here.

We do have children's church here, but I hope this is not seen as a way to get kids “out of our way”, but as a way to instruct them in God's Word. I must admit I was a little skeptical when the idea of children's church was brought forward here, but I eventually agreed to try it out. But only if it was not for the whole Service. This is because our children do not be completely segregated from the main Divine Service. Being able to

participate and learn the liturgy is important. We have a very interactive form of worship and even from a young age children can pick up what is going on, memorize parts of the Service like the Lord's Prayer and Creeds, and of course God speaks and works through His Word, even when we cannot intellectually understand everything. To me, the main question involving children in worship is simple: If Christ embraced children, why should His Church not also embrace them?

Jesus says, "*Suffer (Let or allow) the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*" What does Jesus mean by this? Are we supposed to never become more educated or grow up? Is He saying that the only way to be saved is when you are a child?

Well, obviously Jesus is not saying adults can't come to faith. What He is essentially telling the 12 Disciples is that they need to be more like these children. Young children are generally more teachable, trustful, not over-analyzing, reliant on others, and more willing to show love than adults. As we grow older, we often become more cynical and believe that we can do it on our own. Next week's Gospel Lesson is on the Rich Young Ruler who goes away disappointed, self-righteous, and unwilling to surrender everything in His life to the Lord. In the same chapter this learned, wealthy, and powerful man is contrasted with the faith of these children who receive readily from Jesus.

Sometimes this literalism of children can even be humorous. As we approach Columbus Day consider this one: A teacher once said, "Maria, go to the map and find North America." Maria went up and pointed, "Here it is." The teacher then asked the class, "Now class, who discovered

America?” Class: Maria! A teacher once asked Johnnie why he was doing math multiplication problem on the floor. He responded, “You told me to do it without using tables.” Another teacher told her class the story of George Washington chopping down his father’s cherry tree and not punishing him when he admitted to it. She asked one boy why his father didn’t punish him to which the boy responded, “Well, he did still the axe in his hand!”

Most Pastors and Sunday School teachers, I believe, will tell you that it is much easier to explain those particularly mysterious things of God to young children. They believe not only what you say, but more importantly what God says. They don’t need as much reason or logic in the explanations. A retired Pastor told me of how he had more difficulty explaining that the Lord’s Supper is the real body and blood of the Lord as well as bread and wine to his confirmation classes than to young children. The teens would ask how this could be so as it did not logically make sense to them. He would tell it to elementary age children and they would simply believe it because that it was God said.

Often times as adults in the Lutheran Church we neglect to study Luther’s Small Catechism as we should as we think, “It is so simple, I learned it as a child.” But this is what Martin Luther said (keeping in mind that he wrote it!), *“I act as a child who is being taught the catechism...But I must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and am glad to remain so.”* So Jesus is not saying that we must be a child to be saved, but the words of verse 15 speak of receiving it AS a child. With a child-like faith we accept, believe, and receive the Word of God. He is our all-knowing and good Father who knows best for us. Yes, we will have questions, but ultimately we need to trust His judgment, His plan, and His true Word to us.

Now we don't want to over-romanticize children. The point of Jesus nor this sermon is to say "children good, adults bad." Children can be a handful. They make dirty diapers. They throw fits. They talk back. They act selfishly in hoarding their toys. Children are poor, miserable sinners as well and thus need the grace of God. But children can't grasp the complexities of theology and Biblical doctrine you say. How can they receive God's grace?

Well they receive it the same way anyone does who is born again, converted to the faith. They receive it by grace through faith. St. Mark 10:13-16 is the Gospel text read in our Baptismal liturgy. And for good reason. While this passage does not specifically mention Baptism, it contains rich theological truths as to why we baptize infants. These children who were brought to Jesus could do nothing to earn the love of Jesus. Their parents brought them to Jesus and they simply received His blessing. And children are generally much better than adults at receiving gifts, aren't they? We may try to tell someone who gives us a nice gift that we can't accept it or that it was too costly for them. But I have never seen a child open a present on Christmas morning and say, "You know this is really too costly, why don't you take it back". A child receives the gift gratefully and knows that the person who gave it to them gave it out of love.

The children brought to Jesus in our text were pretty young. The Greek word used here is the word for young child and can even refer to infants. In fact, in the parallel account in Luke of this event, the word is translated as "infant". It makes sense that they were younger children as they were brought by their parents to Jesus who "took them up in his arms".

They didn't "decide" to receive the blessing based on their intellectual capabilities. Like these parents we bring our children to the waters of Holy

Baptism. We don't want to be like the Disciples and forbid them not to be brought to Jesus until some type of arbitrary "age of accountability" (a phrase that is not used in the Bible). Children, just like adults, need the forgiveness of God. The water is the visible element, but "*the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts the word of God in the water*" is what does the saving work. Children can believe, have faith, by the miracle of God the Holy Spirit at work. When speaking of the millstone in Chapter 9, Jesus says "these little ones who believe in me." Just like an earthly child or infant can receive his parent's inheritance if they were to die, so a child of God receives the inheritance of faith, life, and salvation because Jesus died for them. Properly understood, Baptism it is not something we do for God, but something God does for us in making us His child.

I like to say that as Christians, "We are all God's children. Some of us just happen to be older than others." JESUS LETS THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO HIM AS SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD. So boldly embrace being a child of God through the blood of Jesus. Rejoice in a child-like faith that trusts in the gifts God has bestowed upon you through Baptism. Receive His gifts like a child as Jesus takes you up in His arms and blesses you.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.