

“No Adult Left Behind”-

Job 38:1-11
Mark 10:1-16

At a Hebrew school, The Rabbi finished the day’s lesson. It was now time for the usual question period. “Rabbi”, asked little Melvin, “there’s something I need to know.” “What’s that my child?” replied the Rabbi. “Well, according to the Scriptures, the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, right?” “Right.” “And the Children of Israel beat up the Philistines, right?” “Uh...right.” “And the Children of Israel built the Temple, right?” “Again, you are correct Melvin.” “And the Children of Israel fought the Egyptians, and the Children of Israel fought the Romans, and the Children of Israel were always doing something important, right?” “All that is correct agreed the Rabbi, “So what is your question?” “What I need to know is this”, demanded Melvin, “WHAT WERE ALL THE GROWN UPS DOING?”

In our passage today, Jesus is showing love to the little children, the children of Israel; while the grown ups of Israel are trying to shoo them away. According to one commentary, “Jesus was often criticized for spending too much time with the wrong people- children, tax collectors, and sinners. Some, including the disciples, thought Jesus should be spending more time with important leaders and the devout, because this was the way to improve his position and avoid criticism. But Jesus didn’t need to improve his position (PAUSE) HE WAS GOD after all..., He wanted to speak to those who needed him most. He cared about them.

To feel secure, all children need is a loving look and gentle touch from someone who cares. They believe us, because they trust us. Jesus said that people should trust in him with this kind of childlike faith. We do not have to understand all the mysteries of the universe; it should be enough to know that God loves us and provides forgiveness for our sin. This doesn’t mean that we should be childish or immature, but we should trust God with a child’s simplicity and receptivity.”¹

In the book “Holy Sweat”, author Tim Hansel shares the following: “One day, while my son Zac and I were out in the country, climbing around in some cliffs, I heard a voice from above me yell, "Hey Dad! Catch me!" I turned around to see Zac joyfully jumping off a rock straight at me. He had jumped, and then yelled "Hey Dad!" I became an instant circus act, catching him. We both fell to the ground. For a moment after I caught him I could hardly talk. When I found my voice again I gasped in exasperation: "Zac! Can you give me one good reason why you did that???" He responded with remarkable calmness: "Sure...because you're my Dad."

His whole assurance was based in the fact that his father was trustworthy.
He could live life to the hilt because he could trust his dad.”²

The children’s interaction with Jesus in our scripture passage is an exhibition of their trust in Jesus and trust in God’s providence. Note the questions from the Pharisees in verses 2-9 and from the disciples in verse 10-12. They are trying to interpret what Jesus was saying and what Moses had relayed in the TORAH. Jesus said, **“from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”** Cue the Pharisees.. Is it lawful? What about this? But doesn’t this also mean? The disciples asked him about it again, because they didn’t get it the first time. The children come, with no questions. They come, and they trust. They accept him because Jesus is trustworthy. Jesus tells us, **“Anyone who will not receive or accept the Kingdom of God like (or as) a child will never enter it.”** This does not mean that if you did not accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior before the age of 18 that you missed the boat. Nope, there is hope. **One only enters the Kingdom of God when you receive it like a child, *not* the age of a child, but with some *characteristics* of a child.** Children are receptive,

² Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat*, 1987, Word Books Publisher, pp. 46-47.

dependent, trusting, and for the most part, obedient. Children in their early years are sponges; just look at what they soak up from us: our habits, our words, our mannerisms, etc. Any parent who has had a verbal slip can tell you how quickly a child will pick up on what we say... Have you ever found a sponge under your sink or one that had not been used in quite some time? It takes a little water and kneading to get it to work properly again, but it can happen and they rebound surprisingly well. Children are like new sponges soaking up everything around them, we adults are in some ways like an old sponge; it takes a little water to soften us up. We are dried up and have less capability to soak up the gifts God freely offers us- unless we maintain a childlike faith. We have either put up walls that keep God out, or we too often depend on our own talent, knowledge, or skills to fight our battles, to live our lives, and attempt to enter the Kingdom of God. Without God, we cannot cross the Red Sea in our lives, without God we cannot beat up the Philistines that oppose us, Without God we cannot buildup Christ's church, and without God, we cannot oppose the evil that confronts us. We must depend on God, trust in God, lean on God. It sounds quite simple when you think about it, but it can be rather difficult in practice.

Children are also wonderful, that is full of wonder. Look at the wonder and awe of a child at Christmas or of a child who is eating ice cream, or one playing a sport and have that aha moment or first win, or doing their first cartwheel, playing or singing a song, or jumping into the pool. We have to teach them those things because they depend on us for everything just as we should depend on God for everything. We must teach them how to eat, bathe, walk, talk, and live peacefully with others. Some talk about common sense and it being uncommon, but what is common sense? Is it common sense to tie your shoes? Perhaps. But did you know that or were you taught? I challenge you to think of one thing that falls into the category of common sense.

Children are also taught how the world works; they soak up the ways of the world and all of its nasty habits and intricacies. The Children's Catechism asks, "Why do you need Christ as King?" The answer, "Because I am weak and helpless." **One only enters the Kingdom of God when you receive it like a child.** Which begs the question. What are we teaching our children? Are we as adults getting left behind?

I would argue that Children, in their helpless, dependent state are more receptive to God's kingdom. We as adults, get in our own way by thinking we can get into heaven through our own works or claims to glory. Proverbs 3 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil." Children don't know enough yet to trust in their own knowledge or wisdom. Children are defenseless and innocent, but as they grow into adulthood, they learn to put up walls around them, they create barriers or defenses, and they become more suspicious. Adults are not as trusting as children, either from fear or past experiences. The Kingdom of God is given to those who "Trust and Obey" (For there's no other way...). The Kingdom of God belongs to those who are prepared to receive it as a **gift** from God. The kingdom cannot be entered into by human effort. **HOWEVER**, this does not give us a free pass to be lazy. In Romans 6, Paul argues, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but grace? By no means!" In the same sense, we must depend on and humbly receive what God has to offer, while following the greatest commandment- "To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself." Loving and serving requires that we get off the couch. We must trust and depend on God while loving and serving one another. I want to be clear that our works do not get us any more grace or better seats in heaven; our work here on earth is a response to the gift of grace that we have received.

Verse 14 says God's kingdom belongs to "such as these", these who are dependent, weak, and trusting; not strong, not wise, not rich, not powerful- these are worldly traits that God is not interested in. We must "depend in trustful simplicity on God"³. Jesus tells us, "**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**" Children are examples of meekness, granted, they aren't always quiet, nor always mild, but they are submissive; they do submit to authority and parental figures. They are examples of meek and modest beings; children are examples that Jesus has given us in this story, of the traits needed to enter the Kingdom of God. **One only enters the kingdom of God when you receive it like a child.**

An education bill I'm sure you've heard of, No Child Left Behind, was designed to help ensure no child was allowed to slip through the cracks in the system. No Child Left Behind *tries* to ensure that children from all

backgrounds are educated to the same standard. Ultimately, the bill attempted to ensure all children receive the gift of a free education. I would argue that we, as adults, are getting left behind; not in terms of education, but in terms of the gift of the Kingdom of God. God is offering His grace, for free. It came at great expense to Jesus.

Like Melvin and the Rabbi going through the days lesson, like Jesus and his disciples in our reading today, life is about learning. The lessons don't stop. We have strong roots in education and stress its importance within the Presbyterian faith. We can all think of teachers and folks we call on for advice, I am sure. This reminds me of my North Carolina roots and a story from a textile mill. There was a sign seen in a particular textile mill that said,

"When your thread becomes tangled, call the foreman."

A young woman was new on the job. Her thread became tangled and she thought, "I'll just straighten this out myself." She tried, but the situation only worsened. Finally she called the foreman.

"I did the best I could," she said.

He replied, "No you didn't.

To do the best, you should have called me."⁴

God is our textile foreman; he wants us to call him when our threads get tangled. God wants us to read his Word when we need guidance. God wants us to learn Scripture, the only way that God reveals the plan and purpose, and to follow his Word, for **All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.**

So what can we learn from the children in this passage? **One only enters the Kingdom of God when you receive it like a child.** It takes complete trust and utter dependence on the Lord even when we don't understand, or perhaps moreso when we think we have it all figured out. To enter the Kingdom of God requires that we have child-like dependence and trust, childlike faith, while humbly receiving the gift that God offers. Jesus tells us, "**Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**" This week, and throughout the stages of your life, act like the Children of Israel. Don't build golden calves or complain about the manna... but depend on and trust in God so that you might someday cross that river into the Promised Land. When your thread becomes tangled, (pause) when your sponge has dried up, (pause) when you are climbing a rock and get stuck, call on the Lord, trust in the Lord, depend on the Lord and not your own understanding.

And now to the One who is our Rock and our Salvation, our foreman that we can call on in times of trouble, be all praise and glory, now and forevermore, Amen.

³ Oxford Study Bible, NRSV, footnote commentary.

⁴ www.sermons.org