

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup> And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

### **Let the Children Come (that Includes You!)**

Sometimes it’s pretty obvious when someone feels strongly about something. Talk to someone who bleeds Husker Red their thoughts on the current state of the football program in Lincoln. Eavesdrop on a conversation between my buddy and me at IGA as we discuss fantasy football. Watch a chef and how she handles food or rancher with his cattle. Sometimes it obvious how strongly someone feels about something.

You can see that in Mark 10. We aren’t told exactly who “they” are, but they seem to be serious about having their children be with Jesus. They aren’t going to just say this is something important. They take time out of their busy lives to make sure to be here. They bring those children with their running noses, kicking and screaming, crying and fussing, making all sorts of a scene because *this* is important to them. You can see that.

The disciples are serious too. They know this time with Jesus is important. They are learning and discussing important things. But they could see the heads turning to see who was making all that ruckus. They could see the people in the back making goofy faces trying to get the little ones to smile. Instead of paying attention to Jesus, look at them! Certainly Jesus deserves better than this. And now they were being distracted too! This is important to them. They are serious. So the disciples take into their own hands to defend Jesus: “You and your kids need to stop. You can’t be with Jesus right now.” This is no place for babies. This is for adults. This is Jesus. You can see that.

Jesus is serious too. We see a lot of different emotions from Jesus. We think of him as caring; which he certainly is as his heart goes out to people in need. We see him vulnerable as he weeps for his dear friend Lazarus when he dies. We see him loving. But what do we see here? He’s indignant; he’s angry. Surely Jesus going to put these people into their places and tell them to quiet down. Surely Jesus will tell them to come back when they can listen better, when the children will decide whether or not they want to be there, when it’s around confirmation age and they can start those classes, right? Not at all. He’s indignant, angry because his disciples have it all wrong: “**Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to ones such as these**” (v.14).

Of course, we know better than the disciples, right? We have this church where I’ve heard a number of times how good it is to hear the children. We offer Sunday school to teach them at a young age. We have that school where we voted to call another teacher so that

we would not cut any grades because we want children from 3 years old through 8<sup>th</sup> grade to be able to be with Jesus. And we still aren't done. We support our area Lutheran High School, NELHS, where students receive a Christ-centered solid education to prepare them for college and life. We send Congregation Mission Offerings to Synod where much of that money goes to the training of pastors and teachers so they too bring Jesus to more, especially children. Surely we aren't hindering anyone, let alone children, from being with Jesus, are we?

No, we aren't closing the door in people's faces and say who can and cannot enter. But do we hinder children with the attitude that we have while we are here in church? Children can tell if you are just going through the motions. Do we hinder our children with how you talk about church and being in God's Word? Do we preach forgiveness and love here but at home it's fighting, bringing up past sins, complaining about this person, talking down about that person? Is God's Word such a fixture in your life that it's a comfortable topic while you sit at home, when you walk, when you lie down, when you get up? Or does God's Word stop at the church and school doors?

We hinder our children when we tell them that their relationship with Jesus is the single most important thing for their life but then seem to allow everything else in life get in the way of being with him. Think of what we impress on them when being in God's Word is left to whenever we have time, there isn't anything else planned for that day, or when you don't have people visiting you. Think of the impression that we give to families and children when we don't seem to get really serious about their faith lives until they reach that age for confirmation classes. What about all the years before? What about the years after they are confirmed? And then, sadly we seem to think that we can guilt and shame them into coming back. But why would she want to? Or do we say very little waiting for some time later in life when maybe they will start getting more serious about being in the Word. You know, once they have their own family we can try again. But instead what he hears is that they must not care that much about me.

When Jesus sees what his disciples are doing he's indignant. But why? Because they are keeping these children from the one thing needful. He says, "**The kingdom of God belongs to such as these**" (v.14). The disciples have it all wrong! These little babies, these children are exactly the ones who need to be there with Jesus. For all of their cuteness and as adorable as they can be, children are just as sinful as you and me. Babies are the most selfish creatures constantly wanting and taking more. Greedy? Envious? Give a new toy to one child and watch how the sibling reacts. And instead of getting better with age, many of you have said it to me: wait until they are teenagers...And they are accountable for those sins too. As sad and heart-wrenching as it is to think about, if they weren't, children wouldn't die. But the wages of sin is death. They are by nature enemies of God who would much rather be anywhere else than here in his house.

Then again, it's not like we have improved that much with age either. I'm still easily distracted. We are quick to grumble and complain when things don't go our way. We get upset when someone else receives something we don't think they've worked hard enough for and did enough to deserve. We easily get bored and want to do something else. Too often we would rather be somewhere else. Like defiant children we buck against our Father's will for us and for our lives. When confronted with a sin and asked why did you do it, how often is it simply because you wanted to? It's not just the little ones who need to be with Jesus.

The disciples had that correct. Being with Jesus is serious. What they had wrong is that they thought the children needed to be more like them when it's the other way around. **“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”** Jesus isn't saying that children are more likely to believe or more receptive than older people. Again, children are by nature dead in sin, enemies of God, and lost as well. So how do we receive God's kingdom like a child? It's blind trust. When in the middle of the thunderstorm dad tells his son it's going to be okay, the young child simply trusts. Receiving like a child means hearing God's promises and simply believing this is most certainly true. This doesn't mean there aren't any questions involved. Children asks tons of questions. But more often they are questions to clarify and learn not as a skeptic filled with doubt. Receiving the kingdom is singing out God's praises without a care if you are in-tune or not. It's unabashedly confessing faith that Jesus died for your sins; the boldness of children can be quite surprising. A child will remind mom and dad of their promise to get ice cream later trusting them along the way. That's prayer where we hold our Heavenly Father to his promises trusting that his will is right and best.

Let the little children come to me, Jesus says. And if we are to receive the kingdom like children, then he's not just talking about the babies and toddlers. He's talking to you. He wants to spend time with you. That's why while he invites to be with him, he comes to you. After all he is Immanuel, God with us. He's not ashamed to call you brother and sister; he's taken on flesh and blood to crush the devil's head and destroy his work. He doesn't hold us at a distance, he draws us closer to him. He gets into the dirt and grime of this world sharing in your weaknesses and wrestling with your temptations. He fights by your side and defeats sin for you. He doesn't throw you out with the stain of your sin; instead he brings you closer, takes your sin away, and washes you clean with his blood. He doesn't just say that he loves you, he shows his love that while were still sinners Christ dies for us. He rises from the dead and prepared a place for you because he wants nothing more than you to be with him forever.

So he takes the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. While inviting you to come to him he brings you in. He steps into time and space, wraps you in his arms in the waters of baptism, and clothed you with his perfection. He places his hands

on you as you receive his body and blood with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. He dismisses you with his blessing with the Lord's face shining on you and giving you peace. As we face a world filled with temptation and sin, as we wrestle against our own sinful natures, as we constantly are fighting against devil's lies, you have a Savior who has defeated it all for you. He invites you to come to him and he comes to you in Word and Sacrament so that we are more than conquerors in Jesus.

Sometimes it's obvious when something is serious for someone. You can see that when it comes to training the next generation with the Word. That's what we are doing with our school. For almost 80 years God has blessed us with this ministry and God has worked in your hearts to support. Continue to support it with your prayers and with your offerings. Test the Lord in your giving; don't hold back. He promises that when we do he will open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing there will not be enough room to store it. Trust his promise like a child. And then pray holding God to his promises.

Support the work of our High School, Nebraska Lutheran. And you have. God has blessed the strategic debt retirement so that we have taken the line of credit from over \$500,000 to under \$100,000 in 3 years. We have been blessed to update both dorms with new carpeting and furniture. Our students have been blessed with a new lunch program they thoroughly enjoy. If a family is in need for help with tuition, the funds are there so that money is not an issue to keep a child from studying at NELHS.

Your continued support of our schools—plural—is needed more than ever. Oh we can put a dollar amount on ministry because it takes money in order for such things to operate. But at the end of the day, what we are doing through our church and schools is priceless and beyond worth. Remove the roadblocks that might be present. Encourage each other to make use of our schools, Sunday school and Bible Class, be here in God's house where Jesus comes to us. Let the little children come to me, Jesus says. That's including you. Amen.