

Let the Children Come

I. Do not hinder them

II. Be just like them

*13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 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. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*

Tell me, do you think that church and children go together? I mean, do children belong in a worship service? On the one hand, maybe you absolutely love seeing kids in church. Maybe for you, the highlight of the service is the children's lesson. You just love seeing those little cherubs making their way up to the front, maybe helping their little brother on the way. You love it when you hear their little voices joining in the Lord's prayer, maybe like one word slower than everybody else. You love having your little grandson sitting in your lap eating Cheerios while you do your best to listen to the sermon. In fact, maybe children are the reason you're here today. Maybe if it weren't for your children, you be finding something else to do with your time on a Saturday night or Sunday morning. Maybe for you, church and children just go together like peanut butter and jelly.

Or maybe you're at the opposite end of the spectrum. Maybe you're thinking, "I don't mind seeing children in church, as long as they aren't mine. As long as I don't have to be the one trying to keep them quiet or prevent them from chucking their toys into the next row. In fact, because that's the way that kids sometimes behave, maybe you're thinking that kids don't belong in church. Maybe there's nothing you would like more than a nice quiet worship service so that you can really focus on the message, without being distracted by a baby crying or a parent walking out with her child. In fact, maybe when you see the children coming up to the front, you're thinking, "Really? Another children's lesson? How long is that going to take? I was hoping that we could get out of church early. I wish people would just leave their kids at home."

Now, why did I ask about your attitude toward kids in church? Because the Bible lesson we have before us today begs us to think about our role in bringing the next generation into the arms of their Savior Jesus Christ. When it comes to our calling as parents and grandparents, and even more so, our calling as disciples of Christ, that is, as followers of Jesus, the Savior's instruction to us is clear. And it's simply this:

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As we take a little closer look at Mark's account of Jesus blessing the little children, will see that Jesus makes two key points about children:

I. Don't hinder them.

II. Be just like them

The account that we have before us takes place late in Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus is making his way back through eastern Judea as he heads toward Jerusalem for the last time. And along the way, Mark tells us, *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his*

*hands on them* (not necessarily to heal them of some disease that they had, but rather to simply bless them, to love on them, to show them affection with his words and actions.) Luke's parallel account reveals that even little babies were being brought to Jesus.

Now the first thing I want you to notice is that these children were coming into contact with Jesus of Nazareth because somebody took action. Somebody did something. Mark says that people were bringing little children to Jesus. In other words, apparently no one was saying, "I think we'll just let our children make up their own minds about religion. We'll let them find their own way, when they're old enough to make their own decisions. You know, we don't want to force anything on them." My friends, do you realize how foolish that kind of thinking is? Would anyone apply that line of logic to a child's physical needs? You know, "If my baby wants to get up and make a bottle of formula for himself, I'll let him. I'll let my five-year-old decide for himself if he's going to enroll in kindergarten this year." No way! A loving parent takes action to make sure that his child's physical, emotional, and especially spiritual needs are met. I say especially his spiritual needs because of what the Bible says about how children come into this world. Contrary to popular opinion, children are not born pure and innocent and without sin. Scripture says that *flesh gives birth to flesh. (John 3:6)* In other words, sinners give birth to sinners. And again, *Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood (Gen. 8:21)*. Even though for a while, I thought my grandson was without sin, I've since learned, no, he still has a sinful nature. The fact is, my grandson by nature, does not have the ability to find his own way to God. No, somebody was going to have to bring him to God. And that happened when his parents brought a little Hudson to a baptismal font. In fact, maybe that's what your parents or grandparents did for you back in the day. They brought you to God through holy baptism. In fact, if you think about it, isn't baptism kind of the modern-day equivalent of what these parents were doing here in our text? Isn't that why this account from Mark chapter 10 is included in the rite of baptism in our new hymnals? What better example of bringing children to Jesus than the sacrament of holy baptism?

And yet, isn't it ironic that here in this beautiful account of parents bringing their children to Jesus, you have somebody else trying to prevent parents from bringing their children to Jesus. But in this case, it's not Jesus' enemies that were doing it; it's Jesus' disciples. What does Mark say? *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them (Mark 10:13)*. In other words, the disciples said, in effect, "Get out of here. Don't be bothering Jesus." Now, maybe they thought they were doing Jesus a favor. Kind of managing his time for him. Maybe they thought Jesus had more important issues to address. I mean, Jesus had just finished a conversation about marriage and divorce. You know, adult topics. Or maybe the disciples felt that these children weren't all that important to Jesus. Whatever their motivation, the fact is, these disciples were standing between Jesus and these children. You might say they were preventing the little children from getting where they needed to go. Do you know what you call that? If it happened on a racquetball court, it would be called a what? Do we have any racquetball players here? What do you call when you prevent someone from getting to where they need to go to hit the ball? You call it a Hinder. No, not a Heinder. It's a hinder. A hinder is the act of getting in the way of someone else's path.

Well, isn't that what the disciples were doing here in our text? And when Jesus finds out about it, what does he say to them? He says, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Mark 10:14)*. You realize, those words still apply to you and me today. When Jesus says, Let the little children come, he means, first of all, I. Don't Hinder them.

The question is, what does that mean? What does it look like to hinder the spiritual

development of a child? Well, on a racquetball court, you don't have to outright grab somebody to be guilty of a hinder. If you just kind of get in their way, to slow them down or force them to take a few extra steps, that's a hinder. So it is with the spiritual lives of children. A person doesn't have to outright forbid a child from becoming a Christian to be guilty of hindering that child's spiritual growth. It can be something much more subtle. Sometimes hindering comes in the form of a lackadaisical attitude toward our family's devotional life. You know, "if we get around to it, fine. If we don't, that's okay too." Maybe we hinder our little ones when we give the impression that time spent at the ball game is more important than time spent in worship. Maybe we hinder their development by demanding godly behavior from them, without allowing Jesus to develop godly hearts in them.

If you think about it, what is it that we truly want for our children, and for our children's children? We want them to simply know Jesus. And why is that so important? Because only Jesus can give our children the things they truly need. Things that we are not able to fully give them ourselves. Things like the security of knowing that the Creator of the universe is at their side and is controlling all things for their good. It's the peace that comes from knowing that as far as the East is from the West, so far has God removed our sins from us. It's the confidence that our value in God's eyes doesn't depend upon how many free throws we can shoot, or the brand of tennis shoes we wear. No, our value is based on the price that Jesus paid for us. Our identity is found not in our race or our gender or economic status. Our identity is found in the fact that God has made us his dear children. And there's nothing that God wants more to do for his children than to bless them. That's why these parents were bringing their children to Jesus. That's why we bring our children to Jesus. That's why we support churches and schools and colleges to help other people bring their children to Jesus. It's all because Jesus said, "*Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them.*"

But actually, here in our text, Jesus not only said about children, I. Do not hinder them. He also said, in effect, II. Be just like them. Now, maybe you're thinking, "Really? Be just like children?" If someone says to you, "You're acting just like a child," that's usually not a compliment. Is Jesus actually saying that being like a child is a good thing? Well, look at what he says. "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these*" (Mark 10:14). In fact, Jesus takes it a step further when he says, "*Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*" (Mark 10:15).

What does that mean, to receive the kingdom of God like a little child? Well, let me tell you a story. When I was a missionary up in Houghton, Michigan, I met a couple who had 6 boys, ages about 2 to 13. They were completely unchurched, so I invited them to come to our Sunday school. Well, one day, one of the younger kids came home from Sunday School all excited to tell his mom about how "these fishermen fished all night and didn't catch anything. And then Jesus told them to try fishing on the other side of the boat, and they caught so many fish, the boat almost sank. And wasn't that so cool that Jesus could do that? Isn't Jesus the greatest?" All the while, his older brother was listening to little Elliot tell his story. The older brother's reaction to the story? He simply said, "Yeah, right," as in, "that could never happen. I don't believe it." Two people. Two different ages. Two totally different reactions. One simply took God at his word and believed what God said, just like a little child would do. And the other one, who was a little older and thought he was a lot wiser, let his reason overrule what God said and he ended up doubting God.

My friends, that's what Jesus means when he says, "*Anyone who does not receive the*

*kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*” There are people in our world who hear this story about a man who walked on water and raised the dead and healed the sick and was nailed to a cross and three days later walked out of the tomb alive—and they say what the older brother said, namely, “Yeah, right. I don't believe it.” But there are others who hear those same stories and by the grace of God and the call of the Holy Spirit, they have exactly the opposite reaction. They say, “Yeah, that is right. No, I can't explain it. But I still believe it.” My friends, that's the childlike faith that Jesus is commending here in our text. It's the faith that changes hearts, changes lives, and puts people in the kingdom of God.

When you think about this account of Jesus' blessing the little children, it's really a beautiful picture, isn't it? Jesus welcoming the little children into his arms, putting his hands on them and blessing them. Whispering words of comfort and affirmation in their ears. Building up their faith with this words and promises. Giving them confidence to face the future. And then realizing that those children, are actually you and me. By God's grace, he's made us his children. He's invited us to come up and sit in his lap and let him tell us how much he loves us and how he forgives all our sins and how he's prepared a place in heaven for us. My friends, the next time you see a children's lesson here in church, I want you to thank God not only to see your child up here, or to see other people's children up here. I want you to thank God, that through the eyes of faith, you can see yourself up here, at Jesus' feet, letting Jesus pour out his blessings into your heart and life. I guarantee you, it will change the way you think about Jesus words, “*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*” In Jesus' name. Amen.