

Proper 22 B  
Mark 10:13-16  
October 6, 2024

“As A Child”

Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 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. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

~o~

A father was in church one Sunday with three of his young children, including his five-year-old daughter. As was customary, they sat in the very front row so that the children could properly witness the service. During this particular service, the minister was performing the baptism of a tiny infant. The little five-year-old girl was taken by this, observing that he was saying something and pouring water over the infant's head. With a quizzical look on her face, the little girl turned to her father and asked: "Daddy, why is he brainwashing that baby?"<sup>1</sup>

Most of us have witnessed a baptism before, right? In fact, it was a joy for me to share yesterday in the baptism of little Aidan Jesus Lopez, son of Angel Lopez and Diana Thephavong Lopez. If you've attended a

---

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Adams. "Baptism of a Little Infant," Jokesend.com: [http://www.jokesend.com/baptism\\_of\\_a\\_little\\_infant.htm](http://www.jokesend.com/baptism_of_a_little_infant.htm).

baptism, you've likely heard the words of our reading from Mark's gospel before.

In classic disciple form, it seems that the twelve had taken it upon themselves, yet again, to play gate-keeper to Jesus, this time turning away children. Unsurprisingly, this did not go over well. I say "unsurprisingly" because it seems that whenever the thick-headed disciples tried to keep someone away from Jesus, they received a stern talking to from the man himself. "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them," he commanded them indignantly. And then he says something that I've been wrestling with all week. He says: "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." What, I wonder, could this mean?

Popular responses to this question suggest that we're to receive the kingdom while being humble, obedient, and dependent on God – while possessing a child-like faith, usually interpreted to be an unquestioning faith. These responses did not scratch the proverbial itch I felt this week – didn't end the wrestling match in my mind about these peculiar words of Jesus. I don't think Jesus was lifting up the example of children because their faith lacks the headstrong, questing, curious, and independent character of adult faith. I don't think it's something that's missing in children's faith that makes them quintessential candidates for the kingdom. It's something they possess that's all too often missing in us – in adults.

We'll get to what I think that is in a moment. First, though, it seems important to flesh out Jesus' notion of the kingdom of God. For the Jesus of the gospels, the kingdom of God is already here and still coming. It is the restoration of things as they were meant to be. It is heaven's commonwealth of peace through justice, freedom for service, community for all, and enough for all. Jesus understood his mission to be proclaiming

this kingdom and ushering it in. His various acts of healing, feeding, and loving were meant as evidence of the truth of his message and the possibility of its realization in the world.

If we were first-century peasants though, living under an oppressive foreign regime, kept down by our own religious and political leaders, and scraping in the dirt just to provide enough food for our own families, how open to Jesus' message would we really be, I wonder? Skeptical, cynical, suspicious, jaded by the inequity of the world around us – Yes! But open to Jesus' message? I'm not so sure. And that's where I think the children come in.

Children are not constrained by impossibility the way adults are. Children believe things are possible that adults know to be unachievable. In the mind of a child, world peace is possible. In the mind of a child, authentic community is possible. In the mind of a child, enough for all is possible. They don't know better, as we do, that peace and community and enough are little more than fantasies. That's why Jesus lifted them up as exemplars of faith. They still possess the capacity for belief in the power of possibility. And if we adults want to see the kingdom of God, want to enter the kingdom of God, we're going to need it too. Because we'll never work to build something we think is impossible and the kingdom of God is a cooperative venture. "Truly I tell you," Jesus says, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Today is a special day for Christians around the world: it's World Communion Sunday. Today we celebrate the oneness of faith and purpose of the Church Universal. We are reminded that our individual congregations are not alone in the world to build the kingdom. We are a part of a great cloud of witness that transcend denominational, political, ethnic, and national boundaries. We are a part of the body that includes more than 2.63 billion Christians alive today. If we all grabbed ahold of

the power of possibility, bought into Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God, and worked to make it so, what couldn't we accomplish?! Peace through justice, freedom for service, community for all, and enough for all...today these don't seem quite so impossible.

May we receive the kingdom of God as a little child and may our whole human family enter it together. Amen.