

# Little Children

## Mark 10:13-16

### Introduction

With this sermon today, I launch a new seven-part sermon series that I have titled "Kingdom Come." The series will conclude on Christ the King Sunday, a day on which we will celebrate the arrival of Christ's Kingdom. At this time of the year, all the lectionary texts start pointing toward the coming of that Kingdom.

The overall goal of this series is to highlight aspects of Christ's coming Kingdom, things that make Christ's Kingdom different from the kingdom of this world. Those differences are important distinctions for us to know, for several reasons. Let me share two:

1. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are a citizen of Christ's Kingdom. In fact, as a Christian, the Kingdom of God is your primary citizenship. Philippians 3:20 makes that point clear:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ ... (Philippians 3:20)

And since that is the location of your citizenship, you ought to know as much about that Kingdom as you possible.

2. Every week in worship you pray this line: "Thy kingdom come." If you are going to pray that, you ought to know what you are praying for. What do you want to come?

Each sermon in this series has a two word title. Today, the first word is "little." Little Children. The other six sermons will start with the word "big." Watch for sermons titled Big Questions, Big Expectations, Big Faith, Big Change, Big Day and Big Victory. So one little, six bigs.

The picture of Little Children presented in today's text is pretty familiar, isn't it? In the midst of this time of teaching, Jesus has little children crawling all over his lap. Through the centuries artists have tried to capture it. Traditionally, that image looks something like this:

(INSERT ART)

As other artists thought about this scene, they pictured children with a bit more energy, like this:

(INSERT ART)

I like this second concept better than the first one. I think it is more accurate, don't you?

That scene isn't limited to Biblical times. It happens in real life, too. This week on Facebook our good friend and former intern, Dan Mershon, pastor now at Salem Lutheran Church in West Alexandria, OH posted this picture from his sermon time last Sunday.

(INSERT ART)

Dan and the family gave me permission to use it. I told him it was the perfect picture for this sermon.

I wonder what the reaction was in Dan's Church. I don't know. I DO know that when Jesus was teaching on that day, some of the people were not very excited to have those children around. Grownups can be like that sometimes, you know. Grownups sometimes view children as a distraction or a nuisance. Hear it loud and clear from this pastor ... Children are NEVER a distraction here. The disciples were especially concerned about those kids:

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. (Mark 10:13)

"Rebuked" them! Wow! What strong language that is! And that points out the first difference between the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of Christ. Look at the response of Jesus:

When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to (the disciples), "Let the little children come to me ... for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (Mark 10:14)

Now, notice it doesn't say: The kingdom belongs to children. No, it tells us that the Kingdom belongs to people who are LIKE little children, people who come with a child-like heart, a simple, eager, heart that wants to be with and around Jesus.

Don't rebuke people like that, Jesus says. And then He lays out three specific actions Kingdom-minded people take to make sure those people with child-like hearts know they are welcome in Christ's Kingdom.

### **#1: DON'T INVITE THEM! BRING THEM!**

Verses 13 and 14 say:

People were bringing little children to Jesus ... but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this... He said, "Let the little children come..." (Mark 10:13-14)

For me, the key word here is "bringing." People were bringing the children.

It doesn't take much depth of thought for us to realize the only way children will make it to a worship service is for someone to bring them. But we are talking about much more

than simply bringing children to church– we are talking about bringing them to Jesus, bringing them into the Kingdom. Bringing them to church is a good first step, and a very important step. But ultimately we want to bring them to Jesus.

But whether you phrase it as “bring them to church” or “bring them to Jesus”, the process requires someone to bring them. Little children don't bring themselves.

Hang around the discipleship efforts in this church long enough and you will hear someone use the word “alongsider.” As disciple-makers we are called to come alongside people, to walk beside them and to walk with them, as they become acquainted with Christ and His Kingdom. And in that process, we are intentionally bringing them to Him.

It is a practice you see happen all through the Gospels:

- When Andrew first met Jesus, he immediately went to find his brother Peter. And the text says “He brought Peter to Jesus.” (John 1:42)
- Four friends brought their paralyzed buddy to Jesus and lowered him through the roof so he could meet Jesus (Mark 2)
- Virtually every healing story begins with a line like this “People brought to Jesus all who were ill with various diseases ...”

Sometimes we think that inviting is enough. We'll say “You should come to my church sometime.” And then we are disappointed when we don't see those people come. But, instead, what if we were to say “Could you I pick you up and bring you to church with me?”

Walking into a new church or into a new relationship with Jesus is pretty intimidating. Like little children there are many people who might come, but may not come on their own. They need to be invited.

## **#2: DON'T HINDER THEM! ENCOURAGE THEM!**

Then Jesus says this:

Do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (Mark 10:14)

When our kids were little and just starting to crawl, we would put obstacles in their way to keep them from going places we didn't want them to go. Couch pillows worked well in those early days.

- But eventually, the kids mastered the pillows, so we moved on to baby gates.
- The gates worked for a while, but then things had to be put on high shelves or hidden altogether.

All this was our attempt to make it hard for the kids to do what they wanted to do (and we didn't want them to do).

That's "hindering." Don't hinder the children, Jesus says. Don't make it hard for them to get to Jesus.

Later this month we will celebrate the 504<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. While it is far more complicated than this, the essence of the Reformation was that the Roman Catholic Church was making it unnecessarily hard for people to come to Jesus. Martin Luther realized that that the whole faith process was actually quite simple:

You are saved by grace through faith. It is not based on the good things you do.

Through the years, we worked to remove the hindrances to this relationship with Jesus:

- We don't do services in Latin anymore.
- We have newer translations of the Scripture that are easier to read.
- You sit in an air-conditioned and heated building on padded seats.

The attitude of the disciples that day was another kind of hindrance. "We don't want you here," they said. This is our Jesus and we only do things this way.

### **#3: DON'T IGNORE THEM! IMITATE THEM!**

And finally, when we see those little ones beginning to connect with Jesus, we should copy what they do.

Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Mark 10:15)

One of my favorite commentators says this: What is about a child that we should imitate? They are humbly dependent on others. They eagerly receive what is offered to them. They play well with everyone. A child enjoys much but can explain very little. They live by faith, trusting others to care for them and see them through.

You and I are called to enter God's kingdom by faith, just like little children:

- We are helpless, unable to save ourselves, totally dependent on the mercy and grace of God.
- We enjoy God's kingdom by faith, believing that the Father loves us and will care for our daily needs.
- When we have a hurt or a problem, we go talk to our Father.

### **APPLICATION**

Karen and I have a 20 month old grandson named Mason. He goes to daycare every day while his mom and dad work.

- He is the happiest little guy you will ever meet.
- His eyes always let you know he is cooking up something that will bring you joy.
- He loves to take the toys his sister is using and race through the house with her chasing him and screaming at him to give it back.

- He has a friend at daycare that he wrestles with all day long. Every once in a while one of them gets hurt, but after a quick timeout, they start wrestling again.

We were at his house a week ago for his sister's birthday party. Watching him play gave me great joy! And, as you might expect, it reminded me of this sermon that I was about to prepare and preach.

And I asked myself that day "Do I find as much joy in kingdom life as Mason finds in his everyday life? And if not, why not? What needs to change in me?"

I ask you the same question.

Amen.