

ALLOW THE LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME TO ME
Sermon for the 19th Sunday after Pentecost, 2021
Mark 10:13-16

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 10:13-16, the second part of our Gospel reading read before: ¹³ **People were bringing little children to Jesus that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.** ¹⁴ **However, when Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He told them, “Allow the little children to come to Me and stop forbidding them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.** ¹⁵ **Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child does will certainly not enter it.”**

¹⁶ **He took the children in His arms, laid His hands on them and blessed them.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The words of our text are one of the most delightful, most comforting, and at the same time one of the saddest stories recorded by Mark. **“People were bringing little children to Jesus that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.”** The disciples were driving the people away with severe words. We can, of course, try to excuse the disciples by saying that they sought to protect Jesus from needless interruptions and thus save His time for more important things, *but that’s exactly what is very sad about their actions*. The disciples had the idea that children were not important. How wrong they were! **“When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He told them, “Allow the little children to come to Me.”** To be indignant was to show righteous anger. Jesus certainly frowned upon the actions of His disciples, and He still says the same thing today. His words haven’t changed. He still says, **“Allow the little children to come to Me.”** So what does it mean for us, with our children, and in our spheres of influence, that Jesus is fairly adamant and insistent about this? What are ways that we may be hinder children from coming to Jesus? What are ways we can help bring them to Him? And what is Jesus talking about when He says, **“For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”?** Is there something special about children that makes them especially qualified for the kingdom? Let us take the time today to consider these questions.

“¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ However, when Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He told them, “Allow the little children to come to Me and stop forbidding them!” There was only one other time where Mark tells us that Jesus became indignant or angry. That was when Jesus had earlier showed a righteous anger toward the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath and then had healed a man with a withered hand.¹ Now He spoke out against His own disciples, and rightly so. They should have known by this time that Jesus’ blessings are there for all, regardless of age. After all, He had brought Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter back to life.² He had cured the Syrophenician woman’s daughter of demon possession.³ And just a few days before in Capernaum, he had set a child in their midst to teach them what it meant to be great.⁴ How could they have been so imperceptive, so dull? How could they even consider shooing the mums and dads away when bringing their children to Him. “Sorry, Jesus is too busy to see all these little children.”

Well, no, He’s not! And Jesus tells the disciples this *in no uncertain terms*. It seems that Jesus thinks His time is well spent in blessing little children. He does not see them as unimportant or of no worth. On the contrary, we see Jesus over and over again in the gospels spending time and attention on people that the world - or even the respectable people in the church - may see as marginal or valueless: little children, lepers, a poor widow, a Gentile woman, a disreputable tax collector. These are people Jesus cares about, and thus God cares about - and thus we should care about them, too.

But surely, we do not hinder the children from coming to Jesus, do we? We wouldn’t do something like that! Well, maybe not intentionally. But then the disciples had good intentions, and yet they were rebuked by Jesus about this.

How do we forbid or hinder children from coming to Jesus? We’re not shooing the mums and dads away when they bring their kids here, are we? No, in fact, we’d love it if only more parents would bring their children to church. But when they

¹ Mark 3:5

² Mark 5:41-42

³ Mark 7:24-30

⁴ Mark 9:36-37

do, let's make sure we welcome them. Little kids sometimes create a bit of noise during the service or even misbehave. But I'd much rather have that than have no noise and no kids. That's a minor point.

By far, the biggest problem is when parents do not bother to take their children to church. I'm talking about Christian parents, people who should know better. They are hindering the children from coming to Jesus. They are being derelict in their office as parents. Mums and dads - especially you dads in your position as the spiritual head of the household - your number one responsibility as parents is to raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And that means, first of all, getting them baptised and bringing them to church. Nothing is more important - nothing - *than being in the Lord's house on the Lord's Day.* To keep that day holy, to hold it sacred, means to *not let anything else interfere with it.* It means being in church with your children so you all together can hear God's Word and gladly learn it. When you don't do that, you are failing in your responsibility. You are hindering the children from coming to Jesus, their Saviour, who wants to bless them.

And then there's what happens in the home. Are the children being taught in the home? Are you teaching them the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer? These are the basics. The children need to learn the catechism from infancy on up, and the parents are the primary teachers. Are you seeing that when the children get older, they take catechism instruction and get confirmed? You need to do that.

What a mess we make of God's good design for the family! Failing in our responsibility of faithfully, regularly, bringing our children to Jesus, both in the church and in the home - this is to our shame. And I must tell you, I must confess, that I too have failed in many ways and at many times in my responsibilities as husband and father. Lord, have mercy upon us!

Now that I've heaped all this guilt on you, and justly so, for we are all guilty of sin in this regard - now that you've heard the bad news, *let me tell you the good news:* The Lord does have mercy on us! God is in the business of forgiving sinners like you and me. He declares into our ears that His own Son, Christ Jesus, has died for sinners just like us. Christ has shed His holy blood to cover, to atone for, all our sins, including our failures in raising our children according to God's will. The slate is wiped clean.

More than that, God now picks us up and gets us going again in the right direction. There is hope for us, no matter how badly we have messed things up. God is in the restoration business. He's even in the resurrection business. He brings life out of death.

So with that new life from God, what are some ways we can let the children come to Jesus? How can we practically help? Of course, if you are parents of little children, the obvious thing is to flip around those failures: Start taking the children to church every Sunday. Start doing devotions in the home. Do table prayers together - which means having family meals together, by the way. *Teach your children the Commandments and the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.* When they're a little older, get them catechised and confirmed, so they can receive the Lord's Supper. Maybe it won't all come together at once - there will be fits and starts - but the main thing is to get going in the right direction. And when you stumble, ask the Lord for His forgiveness and help, and He will help you get back on your feet. He's also given you a church and a pastor, and we're here to encourage you and help you along the way.

But you know, most of us here today may not have little ones in the home anymore. They've grown up and moved on. They have children of their own by now. So, grandmas and grandpas, aunts, and uncles, what can you do in your spheres of influence to help bring the children to Jesus? Many things. First and foremost, pray for those children, and pray for their parents. When you're babysitting, read them some Bible stories. Or, get a Bible storybook and give it to the parents for their home. Set a good example. There are lots of ways to help.

"Allow the little children to come to Me," Jesus says, **"and stop forbidding them!"** Now Jesus adds this mysterious explanation: **"For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."** What does Jesus mean by that? Are children inherently qualified for the kingdom of God, as though they were somehow more innocent or sinless than the rest of us? **No,** the Bible certainly does not teach that. All of us are conceived in sin, born as sinners.⁵ We all have inherited that sinful nature from our fathers, going back to Adam. So what is it about children that Jesus should say, **"For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"?**

I think the simplest way to explain this is to say that children can only be given to. If little children are to live, they need to receive everything *from outside themselves.* They must be given to. They cannot fend for themselves in terms of food, clothing, shelter, and protection. They need to receive those things. And children inherently trust the ones who are caring for them.

⁵ Psalm 51:5

The analogy is clear. All those who come into the kingdom of God *get there by being given to*. You and I cannot produce the righteousness we need to enter the kingdom of God. It's not by our works that we gain heaven. It's by being given to, by God. **"Truly, I tell you,"** Jesus says, **"whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child does will certainly not enter it."**

Dear friends, God our Father supplies us with *everything we need to enter and live in, the kingdom of God*: the forgiveness, the righteousness, even the gift of faith itself, produced by the Holy Spirit, through the means of grace. So we trust, just like little children trusting their parents to give them what they need. In like manner, God gives us all the gifts of His grace as a pure gift, and we receive them in childlike faith.

Yes, you see, you and I are also the children who are coming to Jesus. And He will bless us. Whatever our age, whether young or old, we enter the kingdom of God only as little children, being given to, trusting in and receiving from our gracious Lord. It is a gift of God's grace. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord God, You are eternally faithful and true to Your Word. You have kept every one of Your great and precious promises. Today we again come before Your throne of grace in gratitude for all Your goodness, in particular, for the gift of Jesus Christ Your Son, and for all the rich blessings we have received in Him. We thank You that He has accomplished our rebirth and salvation when it was humanly-speaking impossible. We thank You that in His life and being we see Your glory, that in the truth, goodness, and love He showed we see Your mercy and love, that in His obedience even to death on a cross we have forgiveness of sins, that in His resurrection from the grave we have the assurance of our own resurrection to life everlasting, and that in His ascension to heaven we have in Him One who brings before You all our needs.

Renew us day by day by Your Holy Spirit, that we may firmly believe in Jesus, love and serve Him, and show His saving power to others in all we think, do, or say. Free us from all love of earthly values, and strengthen our hope in Your promises. Make us more trusting in your mighty power and grace. Deepen our sympathy and love for all people, and remove every trace of selfishness. Keep us firm in Your truth to the end of our days. Enable us all to build one another up in common mind and purpose.

Heavenly Father, guard Your Church from false and disloyal preachers. Keep it obedient and faithful to all the teachings of Your Word. Enable us to acknowledge the work of Your Spirit through the Gospel wherever it is. Refresh us by Your Spirit, that we may remain in living fellowship with Jesus Christ, proclaim Your truth with living power, and minister to the needs of people around us with living compassion.

Give peace and harmony to the nations of the earth. Enable people everywhere to live without fear or want, and free them from all oppression, injustice and cruelty. Influence all in our land to live in uprightness, and overthrow all evil. Help those who set their minds on earthly pleasure and material prosperity to see that there is no lasting value in them. Protect us from spiritual decay, and strengthen those who warn us of moral danger. Save us from every danger within and without, and help us to live under Your continued favour and blessing.

Live in our homes, O Lord, and be the head of our families. Prove Yourself a helper in every time of need. Bless the weary, the sick, the troubled, and the sorrowful, that they may look to You as the unfailing source of all healing and hope.

All these things, and whatever else we should ask for, we bring before You in the name of Your only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

19th Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 2:18-25

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I shall make him a helper, suitable for him."

¹⁹ The LORD God had formed from the ground every beast of the field and every bird in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them. Whatever the man named each living creature, that became its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all the

domestic animals, the birds in the sky and every wild animal. However, Adam did not find a helper who was suitable for him. ²¹ The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and, while the man was sleeping, He took out one of his ribs and closed its place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ The man said: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She will be named 'woman,'

because she has been taken from ‘man.’”²⁴ **Therefore, a man will leave his father and his mother. He will be united with his wife and they will become one flesh.**

²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked but were not ashamed.

Hebrews 2:1-18

¹ That is why we must pay closer attention to the things that we have heard, that we may not drift away. ² For, if the Word that was spoken through angels was valid and every trespass and disobedience received a just penalty, ³ how shall we escape if we have neglected such a great salvation, which was proclaimed at first through the Lord and then was confirmed to us by those who heard Him? ⁴ God also added His testimony to it by both miraculous signs and wonders, by different kinds of miracles and by distributing gifts of the Holy Spirit as He wished.

⁵ For it is not to angels that He has subordinated the coming world, about which we are speaking. ⁶ However, somewhere someone has declared: **“What is man that You are mindful of him or a son of man that You are concerned about him? ⁷ You have made him lower than the angels for a short time and have crowned him with glory and honour. You have placed him in charge of what Your hands have made. ⁸ You have subordinated all things under His feet.”** For, when God subordinated all things to Him, He left nothing that is not subordinated to Him.

At present, we do not yet see that all things have been made subordinate to him. ⁹ However, we see Jesus, who **for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour** because He suffered death, so that, by God’s grace, He might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ For it was fitting for Him, because of whom all things exist and through whom all things exist, that, when He brought many sons to glory, He should make the Author of their salvation complete through sufferings. ¹¹ For He who makes people holy and those who are made holy are all derived from one. That is why He is not ashamed to call them **“brothers.”** ¹² He says: **“I shall proclaim Your Name to My brothers. Amid the congregation I shall sing Your praise.”** ¹³ Again: **“I shall trust in Him.”** Again, He says, **“Here am I, and the children whom God has given to Me.”**

¹⁴ Therefore, since the **children** have shared in blood and flesh, He also in just the same way participated in the same things, that, through His death, He might destroy the one who has power over death, that is, the Devil, ¹⁵ and that He might release all those who were subjected to slavery all their lives by fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely, He is not **concerned with angels.** Rather, He is concerned with **the offspring of Abraham.** ¹⁷ Therefore, He was obliged to be made like His brothers in every way, that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in

things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For, because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He can help others who are being tempted.

Mark 10:2-16

² Some Pharisees came to Him and asked Him, to test Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

³ He answered them by asking, “What has Moses commanded you?”

⁴ They said, “Moses permitted a man **to write a certificate of divorce and divorce her.**”

⁵ Jesus told them, “It was because your hearts were hard that he wrote this Commandment for you. ⁶ However, at the beginning of creation God **‘made them male and female.’** ⁷ **‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’** Therefore, they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore, no person should separate what God has joined together!”

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² If a wife divorces her husband and marries another man, she also commits adultery.”

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¹⁴ However, when Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He told them, “Allow the little children to come to Me and stop forbidding them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child does will certainly not enter it.”

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