

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Mark 10:13-16 *Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.*

In the Name of Jesus Christ, who said, *Let the little children come to Me*, DEAR CHILDREN,

-- Are you surprised to hear me address you that way? Perhaps you adults already feel a little left out: "Why should I listen if the preacher is only going to talk to the children?" You may be right. Today's sermon is only for children, because according to the Bible, there's something very special about being a child.

Now that seems odd, doesn't it? We usually talk about childhood as though it were something to escape. Kids generally can't wait to grow up, so they can have more responsibility and do more fun things. When a person does something we consider foolish, we often say, "Don't be so childish! When are you ever going to grow up?" But there is one area of life where it's really good to be childish - or, more properly speaking, *childlike* - and that's the kingdom of God. Jesus' words in our text for today reveal that, not only are children included in the kingdom of God -- but *only children may enter it!* On this important day when you install a new teacher for your Christian day school, consider with me the words of our Lord:

OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

- I. Children ARE for the kingdom.
- II. The kingdom is for CHILDREN.

Children are a delight. But at times they can also be a bit irritating, isn't it true? Well, at the time of our text, Jesus and His disciples were in the region of Transjordan in Judea. On this particular day Jesus was teaching them about the sanctity of God's holy institution of marriage, a subject the disciples were very interested in. That's why they became rather annoyed when their discussion was interrupted -- by a bunch of kids. Actually, it was a group of Jewish mothers who were bringing their children to Jesus. By the way, the parallel account in Luke reveals that at least some of these children were infants - newborn babies (hold that thought, because that will be important in a minute or two). What did the mothers want? They wanted Jesus to lay His hands on them and bless them. *Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them.*

The word for "rebuke" there, by the way, is very strong - they forbade them, they threatened them. After all, there was an important discussion going on! They were talking about matters that concerned the kingdom of God. Certainly - they thought - Jesus had no time for children! That was how they felt about it, anyway. Keep the kids out of here! What have *they* got to do with the kingdom of God? Very shortly, however, the disciples would find themselves on the sharp end of Jesus' tongue. They'd learn a hard lesson about children; Jesus' lesson, that **children ARE for the kingdom!**

The disciples were making a big mistake by forbidding little children to come to Jesus. But you know, they're not the only ones. It's a mistake a lot of people make, even in our day. You may be aware

that most Reformed churches refuse to baptize young children. Like those disciples, they want to withhold this powerful means of grace from little children. Why? First, they believe that baptism is nothing more than a symbol, an act of confession and obedience performed by us. And if that were true – if baptism were nothing more than a symbol, then it might make sense to withhold it from children until they're old enough to understand the symbolism. But baptism is much more than this watered-down Reformed version. Scripture proves that what baptism really is is an act of divine grace performed by God. What does baptism give or profit? Luther answers, "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe." Peter puts it even more simply: *Baptism doth also now SAVE US*. So you see the difference - baptism is not an act of obedience performed by man, but a means of grace bestowed by God. Yet the Reformed reason that you must reach a so-called "age of discretion" (13-14 years old) before you are baptized. They say that *you can't really believe* until you're old enough to know what you believe in. And that obviously doesn't include little children.

My fellow-Christians: *how terrible it would be if that were true!* We know from Scripture that, without faith in Jesus, the kingdom of God is locked. And if little children can't believe, then little children simply are not for the kingdom. Then there'd be no reason to install a new teacher today, or indeed to have Christian schools at all. Then the disciples would have been right in forbidding children to come to Jesus. But notice our text. Jesus didn't approve of what the disciples were doing. Far from it - He lashed out at them in righteous anger! *When Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God."* You're wrong, He said, children ARE for the kingdom, and don't you forget it!

"Of such IS the kingdom of God." With these words, Jesus specifically includes even the smallest children in the congregation of His saved believers. Make no mistake about it, children ARE for the kingdom! *"Let them come to Me,"* Jesus says. That means little children *are* ready to come to Jesus, if only some misguided grownups don't get in the way! What a warning this is for those who would deny baptism to little children. What a warning for those parents who take their children everywhere – to recreational activities, to sports, to social events -- but won't bring them to Jesus - won't bring them to church and Sunday school and Christian day school! How chilling are the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 18, *"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."* -- Mat 18:6.

On the other hand, what a blessed invitation we have here from Jesus. "Children ARE for the kingdom," Jesus says, "so bring them to Me!" That's why we bring even our infant children to be baptized - because they're part of the "all nations" Jesus commanded us to baptize, because they too are sinful and need forgiveness, and because they too can believe -- as this text so clearly proves!

Like those Jewish mothers did that day, Christian parents are encouraged by the Savior to bring their children to Him. Bring them early, and bring them often! An expert on child development once advised, "Be very careful what you put into the head of a child, because chances are you'll never get it out again." How true that is! How important is the instruction received here in your Christian school! The lessons children learn in their youth remain with them for the rest of their lives. Many an elderly Christian has gone to his rest treasuring the Bible stories he learned at his mother's knee, the faithful teachings he learned in Sunday School and confirmation class and Christian day school -- the beloved hymns he sang in the church he grew up in. Wise King Solomon said in the Book of Proverbs, *"Train up*

*a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." --Pr 22:6. As often as you bring your children to Jesus, you will never be turned away. Christ promises to give them His richest blessings. At the conclusion of our text comes the scene that we've often seen portrayed so touchingly in artists' pictures: *And Jesus took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.**

Children ARE for the kingdom, there's no doubt about that. If that were the only message of this text, I could say "Amen" right now. But Jesus has another lesson to teach us here, and this one is for everybody - parents and single people, children and grownups alike. The lesson is: **The kingdom is for CHILDREN.** You might think that's the same thing, but it's not. Jesus said, *"Of such is the kingdom of God,"* and He was talking about children. We understand that part. But He added this: *Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.* This is something else again! Jesus says that not only are children admitted to the kingdom -- but nobody *except* children *can* be admitted. You have to be a child to be saved! That doesn't mean that you must be four feet tall and under the age of ten. But it does mean that you must have a faith that is **CHILDLIKE.** Jesus said you have to *"receive the kingdom of God as a little child."*

And how does a child receive things? Well, let's think about that for a moment. A child receives things with simple acceptance. The kingdom of God is only for those with a child's acceptance. When a little child asks his parents what a giraffe is, or how an automobile works, and they explain it to him, he accepts what they tell him in simple faith. For a child, the test of truth is very simple: if Mom and Dad say so, then it must be true. When parents tell their children about Jesus - how He loves them, and how He suffered and died to take away their sins so they could live in heaven with Him one day - they accept it. For us grownups, having a *childlike faith* means that we accept the truths of salvation in the same way. Not because we have scientific proof. Certainly not because it makes sense to us - a lot of God's Word makes no sense at all to our human reason. And the best example of that is the Gospel itself. The idea that God would sacrifice His perfect Son to save sinners like you and me, well, that doesn't make a whole lot of sense, does it? Still, we believe it in the same way a child believes his father. We believe it because our Heavenly Father says it's true: *"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!"* A childlike faith accepts that wonder of God's grace simply because the Bible says so.

Furthermore, the kingdom of God is only for those with a child's humility. Can you imagine a child refusing to eat the food his parents give him because he didn't have a hand in providing it? Of course not! Your two-year-old doesn't try to pay you for his supper. He accepts it from you gratefully, simply because he needs it, he's hungry for it, and because you're the only one who can provide it. But so many adults will reject the grace of God unless they can provide some wretched good works in exchange. They ignore the Word of God which says, *"By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."* They're too proud to admit that they need it, and that Jesus is the only One who can provide it! Let us come to our Savior with a childlike humility, realizing our helplessness, and trusting in His precious blood for our complete forgiveness.

Finally, the kingdom of God is only for those with a child's trust. When a father picks up his little daughter and tosses her up in the air, she laughs and enjoys it. Why? Because she trusts her father -- she has faith in him. Even though she finds herself eight feet off the floor with nothing supporting her, which would normally be very frightening, she's not afraid, because she has faith in her father. That's the kind of childlike faith our Heavenly Father wants you to have in Him. And you need to have that kind of faith, because between here and Judgment Day you're going to find yourself in some situations that would be very frightening if you had no Heavenly Father to put your trust in! You're going to find

yourself eight feet off the floor with no visible means of support, and with a very painful impact coming up fast! But with a child's trust, your mind can be at ease. Your Heavenly Father is there, and His loving hands are well prepared to catch you before ever you fall. You can have courage, come what may. In the 51st Psalm, God gives you a set of emergency instructions that are as simple as they are effective: *"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me!" --Ps 50:1.*

There are advantages to being a child – especially to being God's child. For how can God *fail* to protect and provide for His own children? Paul asks, *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* – Rom 8:32. Money, a house to live in, food to eat, deliverance from trouble – those are the easy things. Forgiveness – that's the hard thing! William Barclay once wrote, "Forgiveness is a costly thing. Even human forgiveness is costly. When a son or a daughter goes wrong, a father or a mother may forgive; but that forgiveness has brought tears... There was a price of a broken heart to pay. Divine forgiveness is far more costly still. God is love, but God is also holiness. God, least of all, can break the great moral laws on which the universe is built. Sin must have its punishment or the very structure of life disintegrates. And God alone can pay the terrible price that is necessary before men can be forgiven. Forgiveness is never a case of saying: 'It's all right; it doesn't matter.' Forgiveness is the most costly thing in the world."

Forgiveness is costly, but God paid. And this is ironic, because this kingdom – the "kingdom that is for children" – was purchased by God at the price of His own Child's life. His only-begotten Son He sent down the Road of Sorrows to suffer for us on the cross. And by His suffering you and I are cleansed.

What a blessed truth! What a comfort for our daily walk! When the stress and anxiety of day-to-day life threaten to get the better of you, it's good to keep in mind this blessed cleansing that God has given you in Christ. In many workplaces nowadays you're not allowed to display any religious symbols, or passages, or anything like that. But I knew one office worker, a Christian, who kept a bottle of Wite-Out on his desk – you know, the correction fluid you use to cover up errors. No one would ever notice or object to that. But *he* noticed it. He said that every time he looked at it, it reminded him of Jesus. It reminded him of what John said in his first epistle: *"the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."* And Christ's blood truly does erase sin! It deletes it from the record. In God's eyes, the blood of His Son renders us as white and pristine and righteous as our Savior Himself. *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, " Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."* – Is 1:18.

You hear it every day - people asking that old question, "When are you going to grow up?" It's a comfort to know that, when it comes to the most important part of your life - membership in Christ's kingdom of grace - the Lord doesn't expect you to be a grown-up. He allows you, and encourages you, to be a child. Today you welcome the teacher who will lead the children of the congregation, each day, to the arms of their loving Savior. But they're not the only ones. We can come, too! In fact, when it comes to trusting and believing our Heavenly Father, let us all be children -- **for of such is the kingdom of God! AMEN.**

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