

Asking Like Little Children

Mark 10:13-16

Introduction - Kids!

There are a many many reasons why I'm glad that I married Alison. One of those reasons is that Alison is great with little children. When I was first appointed as a youth worker in Sydney it was to be the children and youth worker. Youth was fine but children ... well that was another story. It took me the first six months in the role to remember to look down when entering a room otherwise I'd end up wiping my feet while saying, "The little ones squash really easily."

You think I'm joking, but this passage brings back memories for me. The first time I ever baptised a child I remember holding the child, I had managed to wet the baby's head without dropping the boy and he wasn't even crying. However, I then swivelled to present him to the congregation and hadn't seen that a little girl had come up for a closer look. My leg proceeded to collect this little girl and send her flying so then I did have a crying child to deal with. After the service one of the men in the church came up to me and said, "What's that Bible verse? Bring unto me the little children and I will trample them to death!"

The Situation (v. 13)

My introduction is to help you understand me when I say, "I might be inclined to agree with the disciples when they were trying to stop the little children coming to Jesus." I mean their kids, they're often dirty, they're frequently smelly and well ... they're just in the way.

We read, "People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them." Although the word "people" is used, the word is actually masculine and so it could be that dads were bringing their children or it could be that bigger children were bringing smaller children. If it is that bigger kids are bringing smaller kids that might help explain the strength of the disciples reaction

because, well, “What are these unsupervised ratbags doing here? Where’s your parents?” Whoever’s bringing them, it may not be that the disciples are being intentionally harsh or abusive here, it’s just that Jesus is a busy man and there’s bound to be people more important than kids for him to speak with and pray for.

Why Children and Like Children? (v. 14-15)

Fortunately for the children Jesus is a lot more like Alison than he is like the disciples ... or me. Rather than seeing the children as an intrusion he sees them as a great example of the type of welcome he is looking for.

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. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’

So then, the obvious question for us is why does Jesus say that we have to receive the kingdom of God like a little child? Today I want to very briefly examine what it means to have child-like faith and then we’re going to spend time practicing and demonstrating such faith.

The first thing to note about children of the ancient era is that they were predominantly considered insignificant. The likely reason the disciples wanted to keep the children from Jesus is that they were an insignificant distraction. Related to being insignificant, children are undeserving and by this I mean children do not do something to earn a reward. What does this mean for us? Are you willing to consider yourself as insignificant when compared to God and undeserving of his care? Us adults struggle with this because we’re always trying to do something to earn our spot or, at the very least, we want to compare ourselves to others and therefore believe that we’re more deserving than other people. To receive the kingdom of God like a child means that we will receive it based on the loving care of our Father, not based on our significance or efforts.

Not only is having child-like faith required for receiving God’s kingdom but it’s also required for continuing to receive the kingdom. We need to continue to have

child-like faith to know our Heavenly Father. Children are relatively helpless and so normally are willing to ask for help. Asking for help of course is different to whiningly demanding things. That's being childish, not child-like. No we don't demand but we're consistently encouraged by Jesus to ask in prayer of our Heavenly Father and he know's what is best for us. As we ask for assistance we acknowledge our need and we also demonstrate the trust that a child has.

Trust is pretty much a synonym for faith and so child-like faith is child-like trust. Children trust their parents, almost implicitly, and that is why it is such a terrible thing when that is betrayed. Here we're encouraged to have child-like trust in a Father who will never betray us or give us what is bad for us.

Shockingly perhaps, this humble position is not an optional extra, as if some weak people will need to receive the kingdom of God like a child but there's others who will be fine on their own efforts. Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." This then is the choice before us: Will we humble ourselves and express our need or will we hope in our own efforts, our own significance, our own worth? God wants us to trust him with simple child-like faith but he won't force that upon us even if the consequences of such a choice are not what he wants for us.

Receive Jesus' Blessings (v. 16)

And for the children in this story, they do receive Jesus' blessing. "And [Jesus] took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them." How simple it is to receive God's blessing and this makes it all the more tragic when it is rejected.

I wonder what blessing the children may have asked of Jesus? Did they simply receive a prayer for God's protection and care or were comments about sick mummies and scary dreams at night made to Jesus and so he also prayed for those concerns too? We may not know what was asked for by the children but we do know

that our Father in Heaven wants us to share such concerns with him and that's what we're about to do.

Conclusion

We're now going to have a series of prayer times, mixed with songs and Bible reading. I will put some prayer points up on the screen that may help you in your prayers but please don't feel like you need to rigidly stick to those points.

Before we pray we're going to sing again. I tried to find a song which reminds me of child-like faith and this is, "Trust and Obey". Obedience is not the opposite of grace, we're not dropping being a child and trying to earn something. Obedience is an expression of our trust and so this song will also, appropriately, be our offering song as we demonstrate our child-like obedience to Christ's command to be rich towards God as well as trusting like a child that God will always meet our every need.