

## The Kingdom of Children

**Text:** Mark 10: 13-16

**Readings:** mark 10:13-16; Proverbs 3: 1-12

We've had a fantastic time this morning.

We have witnessed the baptism of little Brock Hamilton.

We've committed ourselves to his spiritual nurture...

That is true for each of us...more so for the parents and god-parents...

But we all take some responsibility in that work.

Did you know that most people come to faith in Jesus Christ while they are still young.

In their teens...the figure is about 80%...that's huge.

Let's do a little experiment.

Hands up if you came to believe in Jesus Christ before 16 (Before 20)?

I mean...when did you trust Jesus Christ as your own?

Not when your parents brought you to church;

not when you started Kids programs;

not when you did your PoF.

But when did you turn from your sin and trust Jesus Christ as your own?

Some people say...

it is because you can brainwash children when they are young and impressionable.

Other parents say: 'I want to let them make their own mind up. I want to allow them the space, I'm not going to shove my religion down their throat in order that they make up their own mind, and they'll choose from the commercial religious supermarket of life later on'.

Even if that is your philosophy, you still need to give them the gospel...so they know what they are going to reject if they want some other religion.

Others say: 'They're just children, what can children understand about the type of message that you're preaching today?'

Well, here's what Jesus says: 'These children have the potential to be members of the kingdom of God, just like any man or woman'.

Brock and Dylan and the other children of the church are looking **at us** and **to us** for teaching, example, direction and help.

If faith is often developed and grown in early years...

then that puts a huge emphasis on the importance of the things we do as parents, god parents, grandparents, children's ministry workers and church members.

That is why the passage this morning is so important.

Here were adults, the disciples of all people, blocking children from seeing Jesus.

**Just to set the scene**

Children were considered relatively unimportant in the Jewish society.

But it was also a Jewish custom to have children brought to a rabbi to have them blessed.

Here were people bringing little children to Jesus, for his blessing.

There was nothing unusual about this.

What was unusual was the reaction of the disciples to this.

The disciples try to protect Jesus from this unwelcome interruption.

They feel that Jesus has more important concerns than to be bothered by children.

Their intervention was probably well meaning, but Jesus is cross with them.

It is the only time in Mark's gospel that we read of Jesus being angry.

The word implies both irritation and impatience.

The disciples have still not understood how different things are in the kingdom of God.

They are still thinking in terms of value and importance.

They were still preoccupied with visions of greatness...

Forgetting that Jesus already used a child as an example for greatness.

Not only does Jesus welcome the children...

But he utters some of the most profound words in Scripture:

'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'

Jesus tells the disciples they must become like children if they want to get into that kingdom!

What does Jesus have in mind here?

Some have suggested it is their innocence that Jesus had in mind.

That, while they might do wrong, they are not accountable, not guilty, before God.

Others think that children are perfect.

Every parent knows you don't have to teach a child to be naughty...  
it come naturally.

Spend a day in my house and you know that's not true, of the children or me.

It is hardly the case that they are perfect or innocent...

David was well aware of this when he wrote:

'Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.' (Ps 51:5)

Neither is it their imagination and eagerness to learn that Jesus has in mind.  
The most likely characteristics of honesty, trust and receptiveness.

In this sense we must be like them...

Because the Kingdom of God is a gift received...it cannot be earned or deserved.

We've got to come before God with a childlike faith.

Notice the call is for a childlike faith

It is not a call to be childish!

Childish people imagine the whole world is centered around them

Selfish and looking to be served.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes that he put away childish behaviour..

But he never gave up his faith...but increased in faith and knowledge.

We need to do the same.

Notice it doesn't say we are to become like children, but to receive the kingdom like a child.

So we are to avoid being children, and yet receive Jesus like children.

Trusting in Jesus Christ is not a childish thing.

It is not like the faith in fairytales and fantasies.

But the call is for a childlike faith...

So what does that look like?

Three points:

### **1. Their straightforward honesty**

Children are wonderful and open about what they think and feel.

You all know that is true of Asher...

But did you know that was true of Emily too.

We had to preempt the things she was going to blurt out and literally cover her mouth if we saw a fat person, or an odd person, or a big nose coming our way!

This kind of honesty can make us laugh...

And remind us of what we sometimes would like to be...

But we've learned to cover it up.

It is also the way we should be before God.

Uncomplicated and honest before God.

Like when I picked up Asher once...he looked me straight in the eye and said,

'Why have you got such a big nose dad?'

No beating about the bush, no political correctness, no self conscious concerns.

They say what they think.

Are you straightforward and honest with God about who you are, what you've done,  
What you deserve?

Or do you hold back?

## **2. Humble trust**

Like the passage we read from Proverbs:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; depend not on your own understanding.

By nature children are trusting.

We train them to be cautious; life experience may crush their trusting nature...

But it is an inborn trait.

All my kids would fully trust me when they had to drop of a tree branch into my arms.

Trust that I would and could catch them.

We did this trust drop at our last URY camp.

Ben can testify to how hard it is to trust people as we grow older.

Children don't have that problem.

Asher was happy to drop off the platform into our waiting arms.

The older people were a lot more uncertain.

Have you been burned so many times that you find it hard to trust?

People can disappoint you.

Sometimes it is even hard to trust God.

But unless we trust, we can't really have faith, because that is essentially what faith is — trust.

You need to focus on the reality of his love for you, shown through Jesus Christ.

You need to trust in Jesus, believe in what he has done for you.

When you see how much he loves you, you will find that you are able to trust him.

He is trustworthy.

## **3. Their receptiveness to things**

Children respond eagerly to what they are taught.

They have a sense of wonder about the world...it is so fascinating.

You and I need to capture that wonder when we think about God, and his world.

Marvel at his creation and rejoice in his salvation.

Be overwhelmed with the wonder of his love.

I believe that the responsiveness of children is also based on a desire to please their parents.

Sure, children are self-willed.

But there is a desire, deep down inside, to please mum and dad.

They want to make dad happy. They want to make mum proud.

They want to hear those words, "Well done."

Children will go to great lengths to please their parents.

Even parent who are abusive.

They want dad to put his arm around their shoulder and say, "Son, I want you to know I'm proud of you;" or "Sweetheart, you did a great job. I'm proud of you."

Are you responsive to God?

Do you really desire to please him?

Is that your motivation?

Is it your desire to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."?

What about you?

Maybe you've been brought up, perhaps, in this church, you've gone to Sunday School, maybe you've been through the Youth group - but you can't point to a time in your life when you realised that you were a sinner, and you actually trusted Christ, you took that step of faith.

Well, I'm saying to you have that childlike faith now.

In other words, trust Him now.

Whatever your experience of childhood has been –

a non-Christian home that dissuaded you from Christianity,

or a Christian home that encouraged you to trust Christ.

I tell everyone here, young, old: Christ is for you!

Irenaeus, that great old Christian, said: 'Jesus came to save all by means of Himself: infants, and children, and boys, and youth. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, a child for children, a youth for youths'.

He came and took your sin for you, He was nailed to a cross for you, He bled and died.

It is only in and through him that we can enter the Kingdom of God.

Little children point us all the need of God's grace, for his unearned, undeserved goodness poured out into the lives of sinners through the cross of Jesus Christ.

That same grace is demonstrated in the washing waters of baptism to little Brock...

He didn't come by himself, he offers nothing significant to the event himself.

And, you know what...

All of us are children in the kingdom of God...what a fantastic thought.

The apostle John writes:

Yet to all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)

By God's power, grace and love...children and adults alike become children of God.

We enter the Kingdom of God by faith...

Like little children.

And like children we are helpless, totally dependant on Jesus Christ to save us.

Dependant on the mercy and grace of God.

As we sang earlier: In Christ Alone.

The disciples were preoccupied with greatness...

Jesus says only those are childlike in dependence on God can belong to the people ruled by him.

Here is a powerful challenge to the wealthy, the highly qualified, the high achiever, even the average bloke on the street who can easily look after himself.

As we stand before God, unless we admit that we are utterly dependant on him as small children are dependant on their parents, we will never enter his kingdom.

The story is a living parable...

Just as Jesus took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them...

So God receives and welcomes those who have a simple trust in him.

So the words of Jesus are for us today...

Receive the Kingdom of God like a child.

But the words of Jesus are a challenge to us bringing up children.

God places a high value on children...

Including Brock who was baptized this morning.

So we as parents and family and church should also put a high value on children.

May God give you Ben and Karen, the wisdom and courage to nurture Brock and Dylan, so they will continue to have that Childlike faith and trust in Jesus Christ.