

October 24, 2010
The Twenty-second Sunday After Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Luke 18:9-17 (ESV)

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

¹⁵ Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

As we begin to look at our Gospel Text for this morning, we see Jesus sitting amongst a group of people, teaching a parable, specifically” to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treating others with contempt:”

As the parable concludes we see parents approaching in trust too; but not in themselves. They are trusting in the touch of the Messiah. These parents, who are trusting in Jesus, recognize the blessing that Jesus has for them and their children. They want the best for their children. They desire to provide for their physical and emotional needs as best they can. But more importantly, they care about the spiritual life of their little ones; their infants and children. Their longing is to bring them to Jesus for His touch, which is a blessing. It’s a picture we find recorded in each of the Gospels.

Let’s look at the parents first: What can we learn from them? In verse 15 we discover that they present a much needed model for parents today. The example we see here is that believing parents bring their children to be blessed in the arms of Jesus. We bring our children to Jesus as a simple act of faith, responding to His command to Baptize all nations. Think about it.

If we did not believe that bringing our children to Jesus was of any benefit to them, why would we do it? Many in our day fail to acknowledge that Jesus is the Creator, the Giver of Life and all things. For whatever reason, they don’t understand the blessings of baptism and see it as merely a rite, dedication or naming ceremony. They see no point in bringing their little ones to the Lord. They’re blinded to the reality of sin in our world and the consequences that our sinfulness has brought into our lives and the lives of their children.

But not these parents that Luke tells us about. They took the initiative. They made the effort. They understood that parents need to take an active role in the spiritual training of their children. They brought their children to Jesus for a reason.

We bring our children to Jesus in recognition of their great need. Yes, even babies have a spiritual need. The Bible is very clear on this point, that all have sinned. We are born in sin. King David confessed, “**In sin my mother conceived me**” (Ps. 51:5).

Our perception of things can be so skewed. We tend to think of a newborn as “perfect” and “innocent.” But the Word of God reveals otherwise. It reveals our fallen condition—the sinful nature we inherited from Adam. This is why we bring our children to Jesus—because they have a great need which only He can meet. In Christ alone we find salvation and eternal life. There is no other Name by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12).

Recognizing this need, we bring our infants and children to Jesus as stewards of God's precious gifts and at His command. As parents, we are stewards of God's gift of life. God blesses parents with the gift of children so that we can care for them for a little while—so that we can train them in the love and fear of God. But we should not forget that, ultimately and finally, our kids belong to God. A good steward does not claim ownership, but is prepared to give back what has been entrusted to him.

Like Hannah in the Old Testament. Hannah prayed for a son, and promised him to the Lord. God answered Hannah's prayer and Samuel was born. Hannah dedicated him to serve God. Believing parents do the same today. We dedicate our children to the Lord, even as we are to dedicate *everything* God has given to us. This is part of what it means to be a steward. But it's not what we do for God that will save our children.

Baptism is o so much more. It's what God, in Christ, has done for us.

We can bring our little ones to Jesus in holy baptism. Why? Because children need the blessing that our Lord bestows in baptism and Jesus commands us to take our infants and children. Although Jesus is not said to be baptizing anyone here in Luke, these parents are seeking His touch just the same—they were bringing their babies to Jesus for His blessing. The touch of Jesus is referenced in many places by Luke. The hemorrhaging woman in Luke 6; the leper healed by touch in Luke 5; the widow's son at Nain in Chapter 7; even the servant's ear in chapter 22. That life giving touch is given by Jesus...this is what the mothers were seeking in this today's Text...this is what we seek when we bring our children to the baptismal font at Jesus' command.

So many want to tell us that it was walking and talking children; ones that could speak up and call out to Jesus...but this is one of those times that looking into the original Greek give us some insight. It's worth noting that Luke, actually uses a Greek word (*brephos*) which speaks of a very small child—an infant—a word that is also used in some contexts to refer even to an unborn child. The world calls a baby a fetus before a child is born, and it's a word that I gag on, because it takes the humanity away from the precious human life that God has given.

Paul uses this same word, *brephos*, in 2 Timothy 3:15 when he describes Timothy as knowing the Scriptures from the time he was an infant.

With these facts before us it is clear that there were in fact, babies—nursing infants—that were being brought to Jesus on this occasion.

This is the truth God's Word would impress on us: We bring our children to Jesus seeking His blessing. When the Scripture says that “**they were bringing children to him that He might touch them...**” it doesn't mean that this was simply some sort of

cultural ritual or family tradition they were obliged to keep. Their desire to have Jesus touch their children was for the purpose of receiving His blessing. These parents were coming to Jesus in faith, expecting that His touch was able to impart exactly what their children needed most.

There was just one small problem. Who do you suppose is standing in their way? Is it a band of Roman soldiers? No. Is it a delegation of unbelieving Pharisees? Not in this case. Sadly, it was Jesus' own disciples: the Text tells us: "*when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.*" it says. Maybe they judged that these babies were *too little* to be taking up Jesus' time; *too little* to squeeze into Jesus' schedule; *too little* to bother with; *too little* to matter very much. So they thought. But not Jesus: "*Let the children come to me; do not hinder them...*" He says. We bring our children to Jesus recognizing that some will not understand. This should not surprise us. Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving world. The natural man cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God.

This is like some who tell us that we should not baptize our infants...they are too young to know Jesus. They can't have faith. They don't sin. Have you ever seen a newborn screaming? Not crying or whimpering, but red faced, ticked off screaming!

I can still recall carrying one of my children from the delivery room to the nurses' station. We were doing fine...until I laid her down on that cold examining table. My sweet, little innocent daughter arched her back, lifting herself up and gave us a red faced scream. The nurse said: "she shouldn't be able to do that yet" and I replied "she's doing it 'cause she's mad". That anger and adrenalin gave my daughter the strength to life her head up from the table. Was she simply trying to communicate to us that the table was cold? Or was it a sinful anger that wanted to hurt those that had put her in that

cold place.

I believe that if she would have been able to, she would have lashed out in anger. Babies can and do sin.

Scripture tells us that we are spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God. Even if they could, they would not crawl out of the crib and approach the Baptismal Font. Spiritually they can't see it; they are dead to it; and they hate it with all of their being...it is their enemy. So we as parents or guardians have to bring them...It is Christ's command. (MT 28:19) (1 Cor. 2:14, Eph. 2:1, Rom 8:7)

God's Law is written upon our hearts. Paul tells us this in Romans 2:15. There is not a time when anyone does not know the law. So it is to be expected that the world will not understand. Apart from Christ, people just don't get it. Even those who are religious (like Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night) cannot comprehend the way of Jesus—not until they are born again. This really should not surprise us at all.

What is shocking is that Jesus' own disciples tried to prevent it! They, of all people, should have known better. Why would they react this way, rebuking the parents? No doubt, they felt protective of the Master in light of all the demands on His time and energy. Children simply were not a priority on their agenda. The disciples did not yet understand the special relation of little ones to the Kingdom of God.

From our Lord's response we come to understand what an enormous and grievous sin it is to hinder *anyone* from finding blessing in the arms of Jesus! Our Lord was clearly angry with His disciples. Their actions and attitudes were nothing less than sinful. The bottom line? *It is a sin to withhold God's intended blessing from children.*

Think of what Jesus tells us in Mark 9:42:

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea” (ESV). Followers of Jesus surely ought to know this. Jesus cares about little ones. They matter to Him.

This is the Lord that has sought us out by the power of the Holy Spirit. The same who was there at creation as God the Father spoke the universe into being out of nothing. This is the One who sent His Holy Spirit unto us after the fall so that when we as sinners fail, we are brought back into His grace with the ability to call upon His name. And this is the Savior, who left the blessedness of heaven...who came as a child Himself...to save you...to save your children with the wonderful command that is all about grace as He told His disciples, so He tells us: ¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, Matthew 28:19 (ESV)

What a wonderful truth! Jesus is indeed able to impart the blessing of His saving grace to those considered the smallest and the least, no matter their age or station in life. More than that, He desires to do so! Never believe the devil’s lie that Jesus wouldn’t care enough to bother with you. Jesus continues to bless little ones...and childlike grown-ups, too! He cares about those who feel insignificant, helpless, forgotten.

What difference should this truth make in your life? First of all, this truth gives me confidence to seek for yourself that blessing which is found in the arms of Jesus. It calls you, in faith, to experience again the welcoming embrace of your Savior—to find security in His loving arms, bask in the blessings of salvation He has provided. You can be sure of this: Jesus wants to bless you.

You can always count on blessing in His arms! Remember your baptism, feel your Saviors arms around you.

Along with *seeking*, this truth calls you to share the life-changing truth about Jesus with others. His Word calls us so to go and tell.

Remember the first time you held your that precious child in your arms? Even greater than the joy of holding a newborn baby, is the joy of knowing that we are forever being held yourself; resting in the strong arms of Jesus.

Amen.

And the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Some of the examples used are taken from a sermon written by Rev. Terry Moan from a sermon written by him for Life Sunday (Lutheran's for Life)