

God Loves Kids
Mark 10:13-16
John Breon

Let's put ourselves in this scene. Are you a little child sitting on Jesus' lap, being blessed by him? Are you a parent, bringing your child to Jesus? Are you a disciple who's tried to keep the children from bothering Jesus and now you're confused, humiliated, angry? Are you part of the body of Christ that shows the love of Jesus to children and welcomes them in his name?

In this section of Mark's Gospel, we're on a journey with Jesus. Along the way he teaches us about who he is, what he does, and what it means to follow him. Three times in chapters 8-10 Jesus predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection. After each of those predictions the disciples show that they don't get it. And after each of the failures of the disciples, Jesus talks about true discipleship. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him. Then Jesus started talking about taking up a cross and following him.

Just a little bit before our passage here, at the end of chapter 9, Jesus had predicted his death and resurrection. Then the disciples argued among themselves about which of them was the greatest! So Jesus talked about being servants. He had a child stand among them and said, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me" (9:36-37). Jesus uses a child as a model for discipleship and service, an example of the truth that "anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (9:35).

Here in Mark 10, some parents bring their little children to Jesus so he can touch them and bless them. These parents wanted something good for their children. They believed that Jesus' touch would convey this blessing, this goodness to their children. But the disciples try to stop these parents. They "rebuke" them. This is a harsh reaction as they try to send these parents and children away.

Maybe the disciples are thinking, "Jesus is busy." Or, "he's tired." Or "he doesn't have time to mess with these kids!" Or "Jesus is too important

for this—and because we're with him, we're too important." They've had crowds pressing in on them before. Maybe they're worried that Jesus will be overwhelmed by all these people. Whatever their reason, the disciples rebuke the parents and try to keep them from bringing their children to Jesus.

When Jesus sees what the disciples are doing, he gets angry. He says, "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."

Here are all these kids climbing on Jesus, tugging his beard, grabbing his nose. Jesus took the children in his arms, drawing them close to himself. And he laid his hands on their heads and blessed them. Individually, one at a time, he put his hands on each one's head and spoke a special blessing to each child.

Use your imagination now. Get into the scene. Be one of the children. *What's it like to sit on Jesus' lap? What does his robe feel like? Is it scratchy or soft? What's the expression on his face when he holds you and talks to you? Can you tell that Jesus really loves you? What blessing does he speak over you?*

Can you invite Jesus into your memories? Maybe there was some trauma in your childhood. Can you revisit it with Jesus and let him heal that memory and give you his blessing? Maybe you have some other painful memory. Can you recall it and see Jesus there with you, helping you?

These stories in the Gospels have been depicted in paintings many times. One thing they tell us is that God loves kids. God likes kids. This is one reason the church has a ministry to children. And really, all of us need to learn to be like children with God. We're all children in relation to God.

What is it about kids that God likes? Children don't know everything and they know they don't. As children, we're always learning. Kids trust. They know how to live with "reckless confidence."

Children aren't afraid to receive. They haven't learned yet that "you don't get something for nothing." Grownups think we always have to give something in return or that we have to earn or deserve what we get. We

often have a hard time just receiving. And God has so much to give us that we can't earn or deserve. We need to learn to receive.

Kids like to stretch and reach for new things. One grandpa told about his two-year-old grandson saying, "See my tiptoes? I'm standing on them." What is it that makes little boys stand on their tiptoes? And what is it about us as we grow up that makes us hold back and play it safe instead of reaching and leaning into life, trusting God (Bob Benson, *Something's Going on Here* 23)?

I have a book titled *Prayers* by a French priest named Michel Quoist. He writes prayers spoken to God. He also has some that are like God speaking. This one is called "I Like Youngsters":

God says: I like youngsters. I want people to be like them.
I don't like old people unless they are still children.
I want only children in my Kingdom; this has been decreed from the
beginning of time.
Youngsters—twisted, humped, wrinkled, white-bearded—all kinds of
youngsters, but youngsters.
There is no changing it; it has been decided. There is room for no one
else. ...

I like them because they are still growing, they are still improving.
They are on the road, they are on their way.
But with grow-ups there is nothing to expect any more.
They will no longer grow, no longer improve.
They have come to a full stop.

It is disastrous—grown-ups thinking they have arrived.

I like youngsters because they are still struggling, because they are
still sinning.
Not because they sin, you understand, but because they know that
they sin, and they say so, and they try not to sin any more.

But I don't like grown-ups. They never harm anyone; they have
nothing to reproach themselves for.
I can't forgive them; I have nothing to forgive.
It is a pity, it is indeed a pity, because it is not true.

But above all, I like youngsters because of the look in their eyes.
In their eyes I can read their age.
In my heaven, there will be only five-year-old eyes, for I know of
nothing more beautiful than the pure eyes of a child.
It is not surprising, for I live in children, and it is I who look out
through their eyes.
When pure eyes meet yours, it is I who smile at you through the flesh.
But on the other hand, I know of nothing sadder than lifeless eyes in
the face of a child.
The windows are open, but the house is empty.
Two eyes are there, but no light.
And, saddened, I stand at the door, and wait in the cold and knock. I
am eager to get in.
And he, the child, is alone.
He gets stout, he hardens, he dries up, he gets old. Poor old fellow!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Open, all of you, little old men!
It is I, your God, the Eternal, risen from the dead, coming to bring
back to life the child in you.
Hurry! Now is the time. I am ready to give you again the beautiful
face of a child, the beautiful eyes of a child.
For I love youngsters, and I want everyone to be like them. (3-5)

Now we have to be careful not to get too sentimental about
childhood. How we in modern Western society view children is different
from how children were viewed in the first century world of the New
Testament. First century Jews loved and valued their children, but children
didn't have rights, they didn't have important social status. Other cultures at

that time valued sons but not daughters. In most cultures then children were definitely to be seen and not heard.

Jesus says to let the children come to him, that the kingdom belongs to such as them, and that we're to receive the kingdom the way children would. He wasn't talking about qualities of childhood we imagine in our current world. He's highlighting the fact that in his cultural situation children were totally dependent on the will of others. They had no legal or social weight to make claims for being treated a certain way (Larry Hurtado, *Mark. A Good News Commentary*). Children in that first century world had a humble position in society because they had no rights to assert and they were totally dependent on adults in their lives.

Like so often, Jesus takes people on the margins, people who are left out, people with little to no status and he includes them, he welcomes them, he lifts them up as an example for his followers. And, as his followers, we're to join him in welcoming, including, and lifting up children and others in our day that are excluded and held down like children were in that day.

And Jesus is telling us that we have to have the attitude of a child like those in his day. We're unable to make demands and we depend on the good pleasure of God. If we imagine we're worthy of God's favor and that participating in God's Kingdom depends on social or religious rank, we'll never enter the kingdom that Jesus announces (Hurtado).

With children as our model of discipleship, we can first realize that we're God's children by creation. We're made in God's image.

Then we realize that we're rebellious, runaway children. We're disobedient, separated from God, afraid. Because of this we need to be restored, brought back to God, born anew from above. G. K. Chesterton said that "we have sinned and grown old" (*Orthodoxy*, Ignatius reprint, 66). Rich Mullins borrowed that line for his song about the Prodigal Son:

We are children no more, we have sinned and grown old
And our Father still waits and he watches down the road
To see the crying boys come running back to his arms
And be growing young

(R. Mullins and Beaker, "Growing Young," *The World as Best as I Remember It*, Vol. 2)

How do we come home? How do we become God's children again? There are many ways to describe this new beginning and how we experience it or help lead someone else to experience it. Here's a simple, even childlike, description that I remember from somewhere. It's the ABCs of the gospel.

A—Admit. We admit our need for God. In New Testament times, children were the most powerless people in society. They had no status apart from their parents' love and no power or privileges apart from what they received as totally dependent on their parents.

We've seen that qualities like humility, peace, and joy don't earn a child first place in God's kingdom. The point of contact with God's kingdom is a child's lack of power and need for help. An infant or a small child doesn't have social influence or personal strength to rely on.

The first step to becoming God's children is to admit we're helpless and powerless to make life work or to deal with sin and all its effects. Admit that we have no status or privilege to claim. We admit that we have to rely on God and God's love.

B—Believe. Often in the NT, the word believe means trust. It's another way to talk about faith. Because children can't rely on social influence or personal strength, they rely on their parents. In complete trust, a child relaxes in the parent's arms.

When we believe in God through Jesus Christ, we're putting our trust in him. We're saying that we believe he's the kind of God he says he is and that we can trust him. We give up on our efforts to run our lives alone. We give up on trying to get right with God by our own goodness. We trust, we rely, we relax in what God has done for us in Jesus.

Do you remember the old story about the tightrope walker who claimed he could push a wheelbarrow on a tightrope across Niagara Falls? He asked how many in the crowd believed he could do it. After seeing how skilled he was, most of the crowd believed he could. Then he said that he could push the wheelbarrow across the Falls with a load in it. The people

wondered, but still said they believed he could do it. Then he asked, “Who wants to get in and ride while I push the wheelbarrow across the falls?” He was asking them to do more than say they believed. He was asking them to trust his skill and strength. To trust him. That’s what God asks us to do.

Jesus died to bring us back to God. He’s the bridge, the way across the gap that separates us from God. Our efforts won’t get us across. We have to trust Jesus. And that leads to the next part of beginning again as God’s children.

C—Commit. This is when we get into the wheelbarrow. We do more than just say we believe in and trust in Jesus. We commit ourselves to follow him and walk in his ways. We give him our lives. We surrender to him to live for his honor and glory.

To be like a child is to be like Jesus. He lived the life of a child with reckless confidence in his heavenly Father, in total dependence on the Father.

The Holy Spirit lets us know that we are God’s children:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:14-17)

The phrase “adoption to sonship” was a legal term that referred to the full legal standing of an adopted male in Roman culture (NIV note).

Knowing that God is our Father and that God is for us sets us free to live a committed, surrendered life. We can stand on tiptoe, lean into life, open up to the possibilities that lie ahead for God’s children. Since we know we can’t do it on our own, we can stretch and reach and learn and grow and do what God leads us to do, depending on God all the way.

I've mentioned before my dad saying about a newborn: "He or she's all future." There's a lot of potential and promise in a child. There's a lot of potential and promise in you. It's revealed in God's time and ways.

Maybe Jesus' words to the children were similar to the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24-26.

The Lord bless you and keep you
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.