

Text: Mark 10:13-16
St Stephen's

Jan 17/18, 2009
Sat/Sun

God Loves the Little Ones

'Family Matter's' series. Talking about children today, partly because children are such an important part of God's purposes for our families, and partly because this week is the 36th anniv of Roe/Wade, marking the legalization of abortion.

I find myself as the years go on more and more concerned to speak to **the suffering** that abortion has brought to us. The suffering of little **unborn children**, the suffering of **the mom's** who have abortions and the **dads** who support it, the suffering **of America**, where if you count all family members, mothers, fathers, doctors and medical staff who have been involved, four out of ten Americans have participated in an abortion. It is a staggering figure. And I am in that group.

There is a tragic silence that touches this whole thing. We are deeply **unsettled** about what we have done and what we continue to do. We've lived with abortion for 36 years and we are **not at ease**. What kind of a world is it that we have created? What has it done to our families and our hearts and our culture? The cost and the pain of abortion touches every one of us.

Underneath the tragedy of abortion is **an issue of the heart**. Everything is always an issue of the heart, and healing the heart is always the first concern of Jesus.

The passage we are looking at today is one of the great paragraphs of the bible. You think it is **about children**, and it is, but even more profoundly it is **about the heart**, about the healing of the human heart. Children are **God's doctors** for our troubled hearts.

Jesus just beginning his **last journey to Jerusalem**. There was a sense of **urgency** about the disciples. They could tell that it was all coming to a head. It seemed like it was going to be inauguration week! Just when they were staring out, some parents interrupted, probably some moms, bringing their children to Jesus...

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant

Mark 10.13-14

Mom's and Dad's do this naturally, I think. Raising children is an overwhelming task. You know how frail your children are, and you know how difficult the world is, and you know you need God.

When people have children they are **spiritually open** in a special way. I can't tell you how many times we would get into situations with our kids that swamped us. You run short on wisdom, on love, on patience. Your kids get sick and you can't fix it. Someone picks on them and you can't protect them. It takes more money than you ever dreamed you would have to raise them. And that doesn't stop. People with kids are overwhelmed, and that creates a spiritual openness to God and to Jesus. Maybe you could reach out to some folks like that...

Mom's and Dad's naturally want to bring their kids to Jesus to have him touch them and bless them. That's what they were doing. And the **disciples rebuked them for doing it**. **Their attitude**: big things are stirring, we've got no time for this, don't waste it on kids, let's focus in on important things!

Jesus was **indignant**, sharp, angry;
This is **the only time he ever got angry like this at his**

disciples.

He said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Mark 10.14

Why? Because they are important:

for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Jesus several times talked about children as though they were great in the Kingdom.

they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve... And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

Mark 9.33-37

What's going on with this? **What is it about little children** – and we are talking here about babies, too young to walk, who were carried to Jesus by their moms and dads.

What is it that makes children so great?

- **innocence:** don't know sin like we have, unclouded spirits
- **spontaneous joy** & delightful happiness; not self conscious at all... a delight in the smallest things, a wonder at life
- **quick trust** in God and people; quick to fold their hands and pray, quick to follow you, quick to believe that God is real and what you say is true...
- **weakness** – this one is strange, but it is at the heart of what Jesus is saying. Human babies are more dependent than the babies of any other mammal. It is years before a human child can take care of himself. Without constant care they wouldn't be able to survive more than a couple of days – and that doesn't change for at least two or three years. But it is precisely this dependence that Jesus finds so valuable. Their

greatness is in their littleness. Their weakness. Their dependence. When you combine that with their natural capacity to trust, to believe, to receive – that makes them **great in the Kingdom** of God.

In a series of phrases, Jesus presses his point

"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones...

"whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me."

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 18:3,5,10

Don't look down on them... welcome them... become like them...!!!

We think that it is the job of parents to help their kids **become more adult**, more grown-up. But Jesus sees something different.

- Instead of making them like us, we must become more like them...
- Instead of growing up, we are to grow down.
- Instead of becoming big, he wants to help us become little.
- Instead of getting strong, he offers weakness.

This is really **upside down stuff**.

The witness of scripture is consistent and powerful: **you are never too young, too old, too weak or too lost** to be important to God. In fact, it is the very young and the very old and the very weak and the very lost who are **special** to him, and very close to his kingdom.

Jesus said it like this:

Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms

and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Mark 10:15,16

Could we focus on that last sentence for a moment? They had asked Jesus just to touch their children. But he stopped, told his disciples to just back off for a few minutes, and took each of these little children up into his arms. He laid his hands on each one of them and **blessed them**. The word for blessed in the original language is **intensive**; it means he deeply blessed them. Sometimes Moms and Dads wonder about what kind of blessing God can bring to their children. Evangelicals wonder a great deal about this, because we **know the importance of personal conversion and faith in Jesus**. We look forward to the time when our children will own the faith for themselves. I've know a few people over the years who hold their children back from **infant baptism** because they want to wait for the appearance of personal faith. I've always honored that, but I also like to point out this passage, where little babies are brought to Jesus and receive deep Kingdom blessing at his hands. Jesus even says 'to such belong the Kingdom of God'. I've learned over the years that the blessings Jesus gives to little children grow up with them, till their faith becomes not just that of their Mom and Dad, but their very own. '*Let the little children come to me*' says Jesus.

It says a lot about the **importance of our children's ministries**. About how volunteering to come alongside a child can be one of the most important jobs in the world. Bruderhof in 1978...

Last Sunday we went to the Falls Church in Wash DC where I baptized my little grandson, Ian.



It was a wonderful moment, and we had a very real sense of the presence of the Lord, meeting us there, placing his own hands on this little fella. Here is a photo of Ian himself...



Jesus made a point of making time for little boys and girls like him, of welcoming them, of encouraging Moms and Dads to bring their little ones to him.

Because **he loves little ones**. All kinds of little ones. He is **specially fond** of them. And of people like us who find that we are more like them than we hardly knew. Little. Weak. Dependent on his love. Ready to believe. Able to trust.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the great friend of the children and the friend of the parents. To each you call, "Come unto me". In every need and for every blessing you speak to our hearts, "Come unto

me". We come now, Lord, bringing this day our children, and ourselves. Open your arms, Lord, and give us also your blessing. Open your kingdom, Lord, and give us your wisdom, your grace, your strength, and your love, that we might raise our children for you... for you alone and for your glory. Amen.