**Jesus and the Children**

**Mark 10:13-16**

1/25/15

Thought for Meditation:

Jesus blessing the little children “tells us that he was the kind of person who cared for children and for who children cared. He could not have been a stern and gloomy and joyless person. There must have been a kindly sunshine on him. He must have smiled easily and laughed joyously.” *William Barclay*

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About a week ago one of the comic strips in the paper caught my attention. Baby Blues is a fairly new comic to me. Mom was cleaning underneath the kitchen sink. Zoe, her young daughter, commented, “Mom, your wedding ring is on the counter.” Mom said that she always takes it off when she cleans under there because it gets so dirty. Zoe then said to Dad, “Mom takes her wedding ring off when she gets down and dirty.”

Kids have a wonderful way of mixing up words just enough to be entertaining. There is always a certain danger in leading the children’s message. Here are a few examples of things kids have said:

* Noah’s wife was called Joan of Arc;
* Lot’s wife was a pillar of salt by day … and a ball of fire at night.
* It is sometimes difficult to hear in church because the agnostics are so terrible,
* Christians have only one wife. That is called monotony.

The parents of the children who made those statements were probably humiliated. The wonderful part of many churches is that everyone else loves it. The antics and sayings of children bring joy and laughter. Their energy brings life to worship. Now, that isn’t true in every church. There are some congregations that want worship to have a certain formality and decorum. They don’t really want children in worship.

The disciples probably would not have wanted children in worship, but Jesus would have welcomed them with open arms. In the passage I read from Mark a few moments ago, people brought their children to Jesus, so that he could touch them. The disciples tried to keep the children away. Maybe they assumed that Jesus had more important things to do and shouldn’t be bothered with children. He was teaching them deep, theological truths and shouldn’t waste his time on children. Several times Jesus had predicted his own death. Maybe they were trying to protect Jesus and keep the crowds away. Maybe they just wanted Jesus all to themselves. For whatever reason, the disciples scolded the parents who were bringing their children to Jesus.

Fortunately, Jesus liked the children and the children liked him. Please notice that second part – children liked Jesus. In Biblical times teachers usually sat as they taught. As Jesus sat there people brought children to him. He took them in his arms. He held them on his lap. He hugged them, touched them and played with them. The fact that the children came to Jesus tells us something about him. If Jesus was an angry, stern-faced prophet, or if he was a boring intellectual, children would not have come to him. Jesus was a fun-loving, warm and friendly teacher, who loved children. They flocked to his side and into his arms.

Johnny was there with his runny nose, drooling down his face. Liz gave Jesus a big, wet, slobbery kiss, and then sneezed all over him. Bart had a smile that never ended and diaper that could stop a skunk. Theresa had cerebral palsy and couldn’t walk. Michele had been abused by her uncle and wouldn’t talk. Marcus was a shy and awkward little boy with a lisp. Benjamin talked nonstop about crickets and fishing and reading books and playing with his friends and watching the clouds, and everything else he could think of. All the kids crawled over Jesus and hugged him. They all came to him for one, simple reason. They liked Jesus and he liked them. Even deeper than that, they wanted and they needed to be touched and blessed by Jesus. Mark tells us that Jesus “took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The word “bless” is the Greek word, “eulogos.” It means a true word. To bless someone is to touch them, maybe hugging them or putting your hands on them. To bless someone is also to speak a word about that person, a word of love and peace.

This story shows us one of our basic human needs. We all need to be touched and blessed by others. One of the saddest and most moving stories in the Bible is the one Chris read a few minutes ago – the story of Isaac’s blessing of Jacob and Esau. Isaac was an old man and getting blind. Before he died Isaac wanted to bless Esau who was his oldest son. Isaac sent Esau out into the field to kill some wild game. Then Esau was supposed to prepare a meal with the meat and bring it to Isaac so he could receive his blessing as they shared a meal.

Rebekah, Isaac’s wife and Jacob’s mother, heard about this. Whereas Esau was Isaac’s favorite, Jacob was Rebekah’s favorite. She told Jacob to go to their own flock and kill one of their goats. She took the meat and fixed a meal which Jacob took in to Isaac. Jacob had dressed up as Esau and fooled his father, receiving the blessing that Isaac had intended for Esau.

As soon as Jacob had received the blessing Esau came in with the food that he had killed and prepared. “Here’s the food, Father. No you can eat and bless me.” Isaac began to tremble. He realized that he had been fooled and had given his blessing to Jacob instead of Esau. Esau figured it out too and cried out, “Bless me also Father. Don’t you have a blessing for me? Please, bless me.” It is one of the most desperate and painful cries in the Bible. It was a cry of despair, a longing to be blessed.

Esau’s story may be more dramatic than our own, but most of us have had times when we longed to be blessed, but didn’t feel blessed. We all desire to be touched; physically, emotionally and spiritually, in a way that we know that we are connected with someone who truly cares. We want, we need, to be blessed; by our parents, by our family and friends, and by God. We long to be held in or Heavenly Father’s arms, to be touched by his love and to receive his blessing.

The good news of our New Testament passage is that Jesus has come from our Heavenly Father to bless us, just as he did the little children. All we need to receive that blessing is to receive the Kingdom of God like a child.

How do we do that? What does it mean to “receive the kingdom of God as a little child?” (Mark 10:15). To be childlike does not mean to be childish or immature. To be childlike does not mean that we need to be innocent or perfect. Children aren’t always innocent and certainly are not perfect. Even if they were, there is no way we could ever become innocent or perfect.

To receive the kingdom of God like a child is to recognize that we are completely dependent on God. Imagine that you are an 8-year-old kid. Your family is going on vacation. What is your job? You aren’t responsible for making sure there is gas in the car and that the car is running well. You don’t need to worry about getting directions to wherever you are going. You don’t have to pack the car and probably won’t even pack your own suitcase. Your only job is to get in the car and enjoy the ride. You depend on your parents, or some other adult, to get you there safely.

To be childlike is to depend on God for your salvation. To enter the Kingdom of God is simply to accept God’s love in faith and trust. In the Bible, the word receive is often used as a synonym for faith. Jesus invites us to receive God’s blessing by trusting in God’s love for us.

There is a story of a Pentecostal preacher. One Sunday, after his sermon, people came forward for prayer. In a Pentecostal church they might have four or five elders up front who would pray for people when they came forward. This particular Sunday there seemed to be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the time of prayer. People were truly feeling blessed. The Pentecostal preacher saw this happening and was basking in a bit of self-congratulations for the power of his sermon and all the good his ministry was doing for the church. Then he was interrupted by a very clear sense that God was speaking to him. “I am blessing them not because of what you said, but in order to help them forget what you said.”

I don’t know what it would look like in your life to experience a blessing from God. It would probably be different for many of us. What I do know is that the blessing we need, the blessing we long for, is not going to be the result my fabulous ministry or your hard work. The blessing we need is a gift from God. Through Jesus Christ God has blessed us and continues to bless us. We are God’s beloved children.