

October 6, 2024
Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

Kids

Mark 10:2-16

If you stand back and look at our families, parents seem to enjoy messing with their kids' minds. When kids are young, they'll believe almost anything you tell them. There is a thunderstorm and we tell the kids it's the angels in heaven bowling and they buy it. We have elves and furry animals delivering gifts on religious holidays and kids eat this stuff up. They'll even believe that fairies are somehow financially involved in the process of one reaching dental maturity. They take their parents at their word...on faith.

This is the simplest way to understand Jesus' words today: *"Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."*

Little children trust their parents, the ones in authority over them. They depend on their parents, knowing they are helpless to survive on their own. Children love their parents, knowing that their parent love them and exist to provide, protect and serve them for their own good. We are called to trust, revere, depend on and love God in this same manner, more so even, as He is the Lord and Creator of all that exists.

And lest we think this calling is too lofty for us, let's also remember that children can be selfish, disobedient and rebellious little terrors who break the rules and turn around and lie to your face about it. Jesus knows that He is dealing with a bunch of sinners in the world. He came to die to save them.

But His meaning is clear; we are to have child-like faith in God, in Christ. So what gets in the way of that? Well, we grow up.

As children grow up, they tend to lose that sense of trust and reverence. One of the biggest frustrations with teenagers is that they think they know everything when they really know next to nothing. Angry college protesters shout about how the world should be when they haven't even left school yet and spent any time in the world. We grow up and life becomes all about us seizing control and authority for ourselves and leaving that child-like trust in the dust behind us.

Maybe worse is that as we get more mature and learn some of the hard lessons the world has to teach, we start thinking we actually have control over things. We build wealth or perhaps some measure of influence and power and we start to trust in that. We have some measure of success in life and we place our trust in our own skill and cleverness.

Some go the other way, thinking the world is out of control and seek to escape, trusting in any number of addictions or distractions in an attempt to get away from the fallenness of the world and their own self in it. Some simply do not trust anything and simply live life hopeless, muddling along toward death.

But children have it right. There is an authority over them. They know it. They trust it. They're happy to receive the blessings it hands down to them and ask for more. And even when they do wrong, throw a temper tantrum and rebel, after a good cry they return, say "I'm sorry" and gladly subjugate themselves to the authority once again.

This really is not a challenge to comprehend. God loves us, His creation. God blesses us in many, many ways in this life. God has set the design for how we are to live under His blessed authority and it is good and right. God defends and protects us. God makes wonderful promises to be with us today and into eternity. God, out of love, sacrifices for us, serves us, forgives our

offenses. “All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.”

We are to be like little kids, the children of God, before our heavenly Father, taking Him at His word, by faith.

Don't be too adult to do this. Don't raise yourself up as if you have the maturity, the intellect, the authority to challenge what the Father says. Repent of the habit of doing so...and we all have this habit.

We worry. Jesus says quite clearly that our Heavenly Father has everything covered. But we don't trust that and we worry.

We covet. The Father provides for us, but we think He somehow got it wrong because we don't possess whatever it is we desire.

We rationalize and make excuses to get around the clear design of love outlined in His Holy law, and we count ourselves justified in doing so. It seems kind of strange that the lectionary thrusts these two Gospel readings together today, but divorce is a good example of how a lot of folks count themselves clever enough to argue with God.

I've heard a good number of Christians say unashamedly something like, “My divorce was the best thing I ever did. That marriage was a disaster.” God's Word does not pull any punches. Divorce is bad. It's a failure. It's against the perfect design.

No matter how good a reason a child has for running across the living room, when Mom is looking down on them next to the smashed house plant on the white carpet the kid does not say, “I had a really good reason for smashing into that thing!” No. You made a mess of things. The child knows he or she screwed up and they beg for pardon. Like I said, this lesson really isn't all that challenging.

There may be good reasons for a divorce, even biblical reasons. But you're a child of God and you were involved in making a mess of His good design for you. You still repent and ask forgiveness for anywhere you fell short, knowing He loves you and His promise is to forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Being a simple child before God is to receive His grace with thanksgiving. Justifying your bad behavior before God—that's more like a rebellious teenager standing opposed and dying to get out of the house. Not a good orientation in relation to the God of your salvation.

God's design for us is that children grow up, mature both in their humanity and in their faith, and serve Him in whatever vocations He gives them in adulthood. But He is today and forever our Heavenly Father and His promises are not fiction or fantasy. They are His Word of love for His children, proven true through Christ's cross and empty tomb. Don't be too mature to receive all of it with a child-like faith. Live before Him and come before Him always as a little kid, marveling at His power, His might, and most of all His never ending love for you, His son, His daughter.

Amen.