

The Little Children



Mark 10:16 "People were bringing little children to (Jesus) in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to (the parents). But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to (the disciples), 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (For) Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And (Jesus) took (the little children) up in his arms, (he) laid his hands on them, and blessed them."

For the last three weeks, the readings from Mark's Gospel have mentioned children. Three weeks ago, Jesus was instructing his disciples on the meaning of a life of servanthood, and he "took a little child and put it among (the disciples); and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one

such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'” Last week, Jesus, speaking about accepting those outside of his own circle of followers, said to the disciples that “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung about your neck and you were thrown into the sea.’” And today, we hear in the midst of a debate with the Pharisees about the meaning of the Law of Moses regarding marriage, we are told that “people were bringing little children to (Jesus) in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. (as though these people were interrupting something important) But when Jesus saw (what his disciples had done), he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (then Jesus continued) Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And (Jesus) took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.” These simple interactions of Jesus with children the last three weeks speak volumes to us, I believe, on the meaning of servanthood, and acceptance, and toleration, and simplicity, and love. In contrast, we adults often get so caught up in our high-minded discussions, about our principles that seem to be etched in stone, and our well-defined

theological interpretations of the Law, that we sometimes miss out on the simplicity of the religious life to which we are called by Jesus; of loving our neighbors as ourselves, of caring for the sick and the suffering, and of welcoming the stranger in our midst, and of marveling at the majesty of God and his wondrous creation.

Thus, I am reminded by these passages of Robert Fulghum's first book published in 1986 entitled: *"All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten,"* which stayed on the New York Times Bestseller list for two years! Fulghum, by the way, was born in Waco, Texas, and went to my alma mater there, Baylor University. He subtitled that first book, "Uncommon Thoughts on Common Things!" But best remembered from his work is the simple list of what he learned in kindergarten and how they apply to our lives as adults:

"Share everything. (he wrote)

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt someone.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

*Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and
paint and sing and dance and play and work some every day.*

Take a nap every afternoon.

*When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold
hands when you cross the street, and stick together.*

*Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam
cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody
really knows how or why, but we are all like that.*

*Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed
in the Styrofoam cup --- they all die. So do we.*

*And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word
you learned, --- the biggest word of all --- LOOK."*

As I have noted before, Jesus was himself a storyteller. He expounded upon the meaning of the Kingdom of God, not with the use of dogma or doctrine so much as he did with parables. He did not teach like the scribes and Pharisees, we are told, but he still taught with authority. Jesus was a poet, not a philosopher. He expounded upon the most important religious concerns for humanity by telling stories to teach us about our faith and the ways of God our Father.

Jesus was, in fact, a rather simple man. His life was not very sophisticated. He lived in poor fishing villages around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus' stories and parables were rarely urbane

or complicated. Jesus thus expounded upon fundamental questions of life and faith with simple and everyday illustrations and examples, with references to yokes for oxen, leaven in the bread, salt that has lost its flavor, seeds for sowing, lilies in the field, old wine skins, and servants waiting for their master's return.

Yet as I have mentioned before, we are sometimes disappointed that Jesus was not more sophisticated and refined than he was. We are sometimes even embarrassed by Jesus' very ordinariness and simplicity. For we usually seek instead to be polished and cultured even in our religious yearnings. It seems to me that we are sometimes more interested in the lofty ideas of religion, and a proper and correct understanding of dogma and doctrine, than in having a simple and abiding faith in God. We are, I am afraid, often more interested in orthodoxy, than in holiness.

For Jesus often used simple human emotions to teach us about God, and not complex ideas. We can all comprehend faith at that level. It is poetry to our ears. And it is poetry that we need, not theology. It is stories and parables that call to our hearts, that will aid us in our repentance and in our joy, not theological doctrines and dilemmas which speak more to our minds than to our hearts. The Church needs more poets and fewer thinkers, I believe. For we are not saved by the lofty

progression of our thoughts, but by the simple movements of our hearts. And in the end, we cannot really save ourselves at all. It is God who saves us, for our salvation is not the result of some particular human action of ours or a sudden moment of understanding, but is God's free gift to us, in which God undertakes to do for us that which we cannot do or even understand for ourselves. As Jesus said to his disciples "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." And in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "learn to do good; (to) seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, (and) plead for the widow." It is all as simple as that. AMEN