

Sermon: Mark 10:13-16, Genesis 2:18-24  
"Receiving God As a Child

© Kate Heichler; Preached at Christ Church Wayside  
Pentecost 20, Year B, Sunday, October 6, 2024

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us;  
Open our hearts to be changed by Your Spirit. Amen.*

The handlers were getting edgy. The candidate was on a tight schedule,  
with influential people to meet, speeches to give, a movement to advance.  
There was no time for kissing babies and picking up kids.

Security risk, germ risk, not to mention the danger of being upstaged...  
"Keep the kids away!" they muttered into their walkie-talkies.  
But the candidate had other ideas:

*...when Jesus saw this, 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."*

The kingdom of God belongs to children? What?

It's hard for us to appreciate how radical this statement of Jesus' was.

In that age, children were not valued in the way they are today – in fact,  
throughout most of history, children have been seen more as mouths to feed  
and a potential labor pool, than as little darlings to be cuddled and spoiled.

But children were obviously drawn to Jesus – maybe he was entertaining.

Jesus' disciples clearly thought them a nuisance and a distraction,

like some of the beggars and lepers they've been known to shoo away.

But Jesus says, "No! Let them come. Because the Kingdom of God belongs to them."

"In fact," he goes on,

"Unless you enter the Kingdom of God as a child you cannot enter it."

And to make the point, he invited the children to come closer;

he held them and blessed them. Can you imagine what it must have been like  
for one of those children, running home to tell what had happened?

It's a beautiful image – but what did he mean?

Lest we need to be reminded, the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught it, is not the

"afterlife lounge." It is a reality we perceive and experience here and now.

It's a spiritual reality superimposed upon this material reality,

perceived by faith, that we experience with all our senses and our spirits.

And children, Jesus was saying, have an ability to perceive it better than adults.

Why is that?

Everything is new for children, so they are more open to what can be, not so tied to what they experienced before.

Children have a capacity for wonder and creative play – like Adam naming the animals in our Genesis story.

Children are full of trust, even when that trust is broken – children of abusive parents continue to trust that things will change, that Mommy can love them. And children have an affinity for faith – I know people who can remember seeing angels when they were very young, and they remember no longer seeing angels.

I was once in a prayer circle with children, and after we'd told God what we were thankful for, I asked them, "Who do we want God to heal?"

And Ally said, "My bunny." "What's wrong with your bunny?" I asked.

"He's dead." I did not have enough faith in that moment, but Ally did!

That faith makes children very receptive to healing.

My friend always prayed with her child when she was sick or had a boo-boo – and Hannah grew up to ask first for prayer.

"Mommy, pray!" she would say when she'd hurt herself or skinned her knee.

Those boo-boos healed remarkably quickly.

And maybe the most important thing for us – children are able to live in the now.

Jesus said, "Don't worry about tomorrow... today has enough worries and gifts."

In order to be open to the Kingdom life of God, the energy field of God,

we need to rediscover our capacity for wonder, our love of play, our trust.

We need to be able to be present in now. Not before, not later. Now.

Friday was the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi. He modeled these qualities.

Francis had no desire to be a religious man – he wanted to be a knight,

to receive glory for the prized medieval qualities of chivalry, bravery, daring.

An early foray into fighting led to his imprisonment in an enemy dungeon for a

year, and when he was finally ransomed he returned to Assisi to work for his

father in their textile business. But he began to have some religious experiences –

to be drawn to lepers, for whom he had a deep fear and antipathy;

and to have visions. In one of these, in a broken-down church in San Damiano,

he heard a voice from behind the crucifix say to him,

"Francis, go repair my house, which is falling in ruins."

Thinking he meant that church, Francis sold his horse and some of his father's

cloth and used the proceeds to get the materials to repair the building.

Here's what I read happened next:

*“Francis's father, furious that his son wasted his money on churches and beggars, took him before the bishop to bring him to his senses.*

*“When the hearing began, Francis calmly took off all of his clothes, gave them to his father (the astonished bishop quickly covered Francis with a cloak), and said that he was now recognizing only his Father in heaven, not his father on earth. He lived his life from this time on without money and without family ties.”*

It took Francis some time to realize God meant him to reform the Church, big C. He simply lived simply, as Jesus commanded, without extra tunic or money.

And people flocked to the countryside to live with him, like him.

He had a childlike faith, a childlike love for creation and its creatures, preaching to the birds, calling the sun his brother and moon as his sister.

We might think it's cute and lovely – but it was a hard life, though a joyful one.

*Francis reasoned, what could you do to a man who owns nothing?*

*You can't starve a fasting man, you can't steal from someone who has no money, you can't ruin someone who hates prestige. They were truly free.*

He actually lived the gospel Jesus preached.

When you live like that, you have to live in the moment, in the now.

You can't be worrying about what's happening tomorrow, or will you have enough.

And, I might add, the reverse is true: When we're worrying about tomorrow, or will we have enough, we can't truly live in the now.

Living in the now is a call to a radical faith, a radical trust.

Our children – and our pets – show us how to live that way.

Today we welcome Olsen into God's one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

He is being reborn into his eternal identity as a child of God.

So parents, godparents, grandparents, I want to challenge you:

Don't bring Olsen up to be a good person. Bring him up to know he is beloved.

Don't teach him that the Christian life is a life of rules and behavior.

Bring him up to know Jesus as one who welcomes and embraces him,

with whom he can be fully himself, sad, delighted, joking, anxious, all of it.

Bring him up to know worship as a time of serious play as we come to know God;

to crave prayer as time with God, to delight in using his gifts to bless others.

And the best way for him to learn all that is not if you tell him;

if you live like that yourselves.

Copy him, and learn to receive God's life like he does.

Play. Trust. Believe. Wonder. Live in the now. **Amen.**

## Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, 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. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

## Genesis 2:18-24

The LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.