

Pentecost 18 / October 3, 2021

Mark 10:14-15

“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such as these 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.”

How much do you remember of your childhood? What are your earliest memories? What is the earliest event you remember? Childhood is the foundational stage of our lives, yet we remember only a fraction of our childhood. We remember practically nothing from early childhood and absolutely nothing from our first months. When we get to a certain stage of childhood, we don't want to be considered children anymore. Emotionally, physically and intellectually, we want to progress through childhood to adulthood; and hopefully also to maturity. St. Paul expressed these sentiments in 1 Corinthians, saying, *“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”*

Even as we grow physically from childhood to adulthood, we are also to grow spiritually from infancy to maturity in Christ. Paul complained to the Corinthians that their growth was stunted and while he wanted to feed them solid spiritual food, they were still at infancy. We grow in Christ, by gaining knowledge and insight through study and familiarity with the sacred scriptures, which Paul said to his spiritual child Timothy, *“are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”* What do you remember from your childhood in Sunday School? I remember the stories and some of the children and teachers. But what I remember most is that they thought it was important that we learned about Jesus. The older I got the more I realized how right they were and how important it is to know the Lord.

Jesus received children and blessed them, not because of their childhood, He received them for the sake of their faith! Certainly, they lacked the intellectual capacity of adults, which is probably why the disciples tried to keep them away. They wouldn't understand His teachings, so why bother? I wonder what the children remembered in later years. Probably not much intellectual content, but they would have remembered the most important thing; that Jesus loved them! Jesus received them as children, but He didn't want them to remain little children forever. Sadly, at that time most children didn't live long enough to become adults. He would have wanted them to live, to grow to maturity and become adults physically, intellectually and emotionally. He would certainly have wanted them to grow spiritually and remain children forever in faith! He would have wanted them to mature in faith, believing in Him more deeply as their Saviour. He would have wanted them to develop intellectually, learn more and understand Him better as their Lord and God. He wants the same for us at every stage of our lives. Whether we are young or whether we are old, we are all God's children through faith in Jesus; received by grace, adopted through baptism into His death and resurrection and dearly loved for His sake

Jesus came to call the lost sheep of the house of Israel to faith in Him and through them, to call the lost sheep of every nation to receive Him as Lord and believe in Him as Saviour. If you read the gospels carefully you will see Jesus' greatest frustration was the lack of faith He found within the house of Israel. In chapter nine Jesus returns from the Mount of Transfiguration with the three disciples; Peter, James and John. He finds the other disciples arguing with the scribes and frustrated, because they had been unable to cast an unclean spirit from a child. Jesus calls out the lack of faith among them and within the house of Israel, saying, *“O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?”* The lack of faith among the religious leaders and small faith of the disciples and the people who came to him for healing, is emphasized in the gospels. Jesus tells the father of the child, *“All things are possible for one who believes.”* He replies, *“I believe. Help my unbelief!”* Why did he bring his son for healing, if he didn't believe Jesus could help?

In contrast to the skepticism of the religious leaders, the paucity of faith among the general population and the small faith of His disciples, the Canaanite woman's faith shone like a beacon. Remember her? Her faith was highlighted in our gospel lesson several weeks ago. To refresh your memory, she came seeking help for her daughter, who was tormented by an unclean spirit. She fell down at Jesus' feet and begged Him *“to cast the demon out of her daughter.”* Jesus seems rather callous in His reply, saying, *“Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs.”* Jesus wasn't being callous! He was allowing her to express the greatness of her faith. She replied, *“Yes Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table.”* In stark contrast to the disciples and everyone else within the house of Israel, this woman had faith. God values nothing more highly than faith. Nothing is dearer to Him than that we take His words to heart and believe Him!

Jesus received children and valued them for all the reasons we do. But He honoured the children in our text, primarily because of their faith! He holds them before the disciples and us, so that we also take His words to heart and believe. Like the Canaanite women they believed Jesus from their hearts. He said, *“to such as these belongs the kingdom of God.”* We enter the kingdom of God, believing in Jesus. The disciples may have had more knowledge and intellectual capacity than the children, but the children had something the disciples were often lacking; they had faith! Their mothers probably told them Jesus was the Messiah. The Holy Spirit opened their hearts, they believed and Jesus received them with loving arms. Faith is the foundation of our relationship with God. Certainly, God wants us to mature spiritually, by augmenting our faith with knowledge of the scriptures. He wants us to grow strong in faith through the exercise of experience; but the foundation is faith. Jesus identified faith in the children and calls us also to faith, saying, *“whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”* No matter our age, we enter and abide in the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus!

The apostle Paul grew from childhood to adulthood. As he matured, he set aside the things of his childhood. But he was always a child; of his parents and especially of God! He was a child of God through circumcision and inclusion in the house of Israel in the covenant God made through Moses. He was a child of God through baptism, by which He was included in the New Israel through the covenant God made through Jesus and the sacrifice of His cross. As a child, Paul grew in his understanding of what it meant to be a member of the house of Israel. As a believer in Jesus following his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul grew in his understanding of Jesus, through the study of the scriptures and the insight of the Holy Spirit. He matured and became an adult in faith and understanding, but he always remained a child of God for the sake of Jesus.

In Jesus we are also God’s children; adopted in baptism and given faith by the Holy Spirit. No matter how smart we are or how old we get, Jesus wants us to have a child’s faith; a faith which takes His word to heart and trusts Him implicitly. He wants us to have a child’s faith, even as we grow beyond Sunday School in our understanding of His love and knowledge of His being. We grow in our faith through the study and contemplation of the scriptures.

Through the scriptures the Holy Spirit make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus. The scriptures teach us how to live with God and with each other in peace. The scriptures give us insight to deal with sin in the world and in our own lives. The Holy Spirit exercises our faith through the challenges of life and makes it stronger, richer and deeper. The Holy Spirit encourages our faith when we speak to Jesus in prayer. The Holy Spirit fortifies our faith when we return to the promise of our baptism. The Holy Spirit nourishes our faith when we come to Jesus’ holy supper. We are God’s children through faith in Jesus as our Saviour. The blessedness of being a child of God is not a matter of age, it’s a matter of faith in Jesus as our Saviour! Jesus calls us to Himself as children no matter what our age. He receives us that He may bless us with faith by the working of the Holy Spirit and touch us with His grace in forgiveness. He promises all who believe a place in His kingdom, now through faith and forever in His resurrection to life everlasting.

God bless us always with the faith of children; children of God, who hold Jesus in our hearts as Lord and trust Him as our Saviour! In Jesus’ Name. Amen