

God and Children – July 22, 2018

*Our culture, at least in appearance, elevates children to a high and holy place. We often portray children as wiser, purer and more forthright and more creative than adults. In fact we, rather take this for granted. How many of you have seen the video of the articulate little 5-year-old girl giving her mom advice on how to treat her divorced husband? Now from that sublime example consider this ridiculous one: How many remember the movie **Home Alone**? After the whole family accidentally leaves 8-year-old Kevin at home when they go on a trip, wiley Kevin brilliantly and single-handedly saves the house from robbers. [So many movies where bright, sassy kids save the day: Super 8, ET, Millions, Parent Trap] Many of my favorite books focus on children as the heroes: The Chronicles of Narnia, Harry Potter, A Wrinkle in Time. The kids are braver, wiser and often more capable of stopping evil than adults because of their innocence, openness, and imagination. Generally speaking, as a culture, we imbue children with a staggering value. Consider the following:*

- "Children are our most valuable resource." -- Herbert Hoover, 31st President of the United States
- "Every child you encounter is a divine appointment." Wess Stafford, President Emeritus of Compassion Int'l
- "Children make your life important." -- Erma Bombeck, American humorist
- "Children are the hands by which we take hold of heaven." -- Henry Ward Beecher, reverend and social activist
- "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see." -- John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the USA
- "Only where children gather is there any real chance of fun." --Mignon McLaughlin, journalist and author
- "Adults are just outdated children." — Dr. Seuss

“What is a home without children?” Quiet. Henny Youngman, American Comedian

Okay, aside from Henny Youngman, all those references are evidence of the value our culture assigns to the general idea of “Children,” if not always to the actual individual children in our cities and neighborhoods- let alone around the world.

I say all this because it has not always been like this. The Greco-Roman world -into which Jesus, the Son of God was born- did not value children as we do. Greco-Roman thought was that a child was “an unfinished or imperfect adult lacking self-control and reason.” There were Jewish scriptures that describe children as a blessing from God but even these have a utilitarian feel to them: **Ps 127:4** Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one’s youth. **5** How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them... Compared to Greeks and Romans, the Hebrews may have treated children

better. But even they saw them as self-willed, inclined to naughtiness and without understanding.

Jewish religious teachers [Rabbis] kept their distance from children- one writes in the Talmud that *along with morning sleep and midday wine “chattering with children” will “destroy a man”* (Dosa b. Archinos).

For Pre-Christian first century adults A child's value was in the potential benefit it brought to a parent: support in old age, workers for the family business, heirs to continue he legacy of your life. In the NT world there were no children's advocates, no child protective services, no orphanages.

We have a letter dated 1BC in which a husband writes matter-of-factly to his wife, who is near to giving birth: **“...if it is a boy let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out.”** It was perfectly legal for the Roman father [or mother, if unmarried] to decide to abandon a child in a public place [temple, garbage dump] where it could die of exposure or anyone could pick it up and raise it for any purpose: to be sold as slaves, gladiators or put to work in brothels. [Sexual abuse of slave boys & girls was common as was the sexual abuse of freeborn boys- freeborn girls were more protected for the sake of being a virgin at marriage.]

Nelson Mandela, former President of S. Africa said: "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children." *That, I believe, is a true statement for any time or place.*

The Greco-roman world was a dangerous and deadly time and place to be a child.

But God's intention was to change all this. God's prophet **Malachi** looks forward to the moment when the Lord suddenly comes to his temple [Mal3:1] –this is pointing to Jesus coming. That **Day of the Lord** will not only bring about the salvation of the world but God will 4:6 ...turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; **When God comes among us, He will show us just how important children are to God. And thus how important they should be to us- his people.**

This change comes about because of Jesus in two ways. FIRST, As his followers began to understand who Jesus was in relationship to God they began to use the language of **Father and Son** in reference to **God and Jesus**. From Jesus' life they got a glimpse of the loving relationship between the ultimate Father and the “only begotten Son.” Jesus says: **John 3:35** “ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. Twice in Matthew -at his baptism and the transfiguration- The Father's voice thunders out saying: “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased! **Jesus did the Father's will out of love and God loved him for it.** John 10: the Father loves me because I lay down my life... And the Father loved the Son and shared everything with Him. John 5:20 “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing...”

The loving relationship between God the Father and God the Son reveals some things about how God feels about children in general:

He loves them. He gives them all things, He takes pleasure in them, certainly in their obedience, and He loves them such that in time He will show them all things.

But while in one sense Jesus is the **Son of God**- separate from the Father. In another sense Jesus is – as we saw in Hebrews- the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, ... Or as the book of John says: **John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **14** The Word became flesh and “pitched His tent” among us. **In another sense Jesus IS God.**

And this is the other way Jesus changed the world’s understanding of children: As God in the flesh, Jesus’ interactions with children and his sayings about children as recorded in the NT reveal to us in very clear terms the Creator-God’s own perspective on children.

Remember the Rabbi I mentioned earlier who warned “Chattering with Children will destroy a man?” **Evidently Jesus didn’t get that memo.** Jesus has been actively in ministry for some time. He’s gathered his twelve Disciples and is publicly teaching in synagogues and in the open air. And he’s touching many sick people and healing them. So- no surprise- somewhere along the line some parents- most likely mothers, who in is culture had primary care of the little ones- might get the idea that it would be a wonderful thing for this amazing, unusually approachable, miracle-working Rabbi to touch their children, to lay hands on them and pray for them. So they bring their little ones to Jesus. Evidently they didn’t get the memo either.

But the Disciples got the memo!! And in a full-on power-over effort they defended Jesus from being destroyed by these “chattering children.” All three gospels use the same word to describe their response: **rebuked, warned, sternly told.** So when they saw it happening, they got up on their high horse, disgusted that these ragamuffins, these dirty-fingered, snotty-nosed, dirty-diapered, [Luke says they brought “even their babies”] chattering children were touching Rabbi Jesus. And they sternly warned them to keep away and not bother the Master. **Remember,** in ancient Jewish society women were considered less important than men, 2nd class citizens, property of their husbands, not worthy to read Torah or even to be held responsible to obey all its ordinances. And as we’ve said Jewish men saw children as “self-willed and without understanding,” and utterly beneath the notice of Elders or respected Rabbis.

14 But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me;

Mk 10 describes Jesus as indignant or angry over the Disciples action. **Lk18** seems to say Jesus “called out to the children.” [Hey, kids come over here!] and **THEN** told the disciples to leave the kids alone, don’t hinder them. Let them come. And his reasoning in all three gospels is the same: ...for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

So in a culture that did not value children for who and what they were at the moment [but only for their potential contributions to family or community], in a culture that kept children in the margins of life with women and tax collectors and lepers, **Jesus said: Let them come!** As they are! In all their chattering, silliness and messiness. **Mark 10:16** And He took them in His arms and *began* blessing them, laying His hands on them.

He did not say: make an appointment when they're spiritually mature, or I'll pray for them when they can contribute to the mission budget. **God in the flesh opened his arms wide to children and said: "Let them come,"** because they already possess all the qualities necessary to take hold of the Kingdom of God -and he picked them up and held them, touched them and blessed them. That's what God thinks about Children.

In another instance in Mark 9 Jesus catches the disciples arguing about which of them is the greatest [power-over thinking again]. Jesus wants to make his point about the sacrificial, power-under nature of the Kingdom of God. And so it says **Jesus sat down** -meaning he was taking the Rabbinical posture of teaching calls the Ds together and says: **Mark 9:35** ...“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” THEN Jesus called a little child over to him [notice children were present] and invited her in among those powerful, important” Disciples- He brought her into the inner circle- and He hugged her [v36] and said: **37** “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

Now while the big, shocking message for the Disciples here was the upside down, power-under nature of the Kingdom of God. Another equally important lesson is that **Jesus, God come to earth, declares his utter solidarity with children** saying: when you welcome a child you are welcoming me- and welcoming God.

Jesus gently shuts down the self-important disciples and elevates helpless children. In a parallel passage in Matt 18 Jesus goes so far as to say that if the disciples have any hope of being part of the Kingdom of God then they'd best get busy imitating the humble trusting helplessness of children. **Matt. 18:3** and said, “I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. **4** The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child.

So Jesus [God enfleshed] declares God's utter solidarity with children; and expects the rest of us self-important adults to imitate the trusting humility of children if we hope to enter the Kingdom of God.

So God opens his arms wide to children and calls out: "Let them come!!"
[value in them as they are]
And God [through Jesus] declares His absolute solidarity with children.

And one last thing. God takes the well-being of children very, very seriously. At the end of the Mk 9 passage and also in the Matthew 18 parallel Jesus offers some chilling words about the way we treat children: **Mat 18:6** ...whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Here's another version: **Matt. 18:6** ...anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck.[NJB]

And a few verses later in Matt 18 Jesus says: **10** "See that you don't despise any of these little ones. Their angels in heaven, I tell you, are always in the presence of my Father in heaven.

Jesus' concern for the well being of children and his knowledge of how children were despised, ignored, and abused in His day and his knowledge of their natural innocence, openness and trust leads him to give an exaggerated but pointed warning. *Anyone that causes one of these little ones to stumble, anyone who hurts or harms or frightens or abuses them such that they lose whatever trust they may have had or could have had in God [Me] would have a better time of it if he sailed out to the deepest part of the ocean and took a swim with a concrete necktie.*

Jesus image is cartoonishly horrible- but it makes the point.

As Heb 10 said: It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

In the picture Jesus paints the one who does harm to children is pictured as if he would have a better future if he wore a large millstone –for grinding grain, circular with a hole in the middle- around his neck and sailed out to the deepest part of the Sea of Galilee and threw himself into the dark depths.

If it seems violent or extreme for Jesus to say such a thing – certainly this is the harshest warning Jesus gives in all the Gospels- *perhaps this helps us see the intensity of Gods feelings about those who hurt, abuse, or exploit children for selfish gain or to further schemes or power-plays.*

Our focus for this current series of messages is **Kingdom of God Matters in the Here and Now**. This falls into the category because children being hurt, harmed and abused has been a prominent part of our news cycles for the past few months.

Whether it's the latest school shooting, the San Francisco Woman calling the police on a 8-year-old selling water to earn a trip to Disneyland, or the horrible debacle at our southern border with children and even babies taken from their parents.

For a society that elevates kids as wise heroes we make a lot of ways for them to stumble.

As these issues with children fill up the airwaves and our screen time, we followers of Jesus must remember that Jesus shows us just how important Children are to God.

• **God opens his arms wide to children and calls out: "Let them come!!"**

- **And God [in Jesus] declares His absolute solidarity with children.**
- **And God promises with horrible certainty that those who cause children to stumble, bruising or breaking or choking off their tender faith by abusive words or actions, will pay the severest price.**

That's what God thinks about children. THAT is the Kingdom of God perspective in the here and now. And that is how everyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus should feel about children at risk here in our own community, across our country and beyond its borders.

If you didn't get to see it in the theater be sure you get a chance to see the DVD "Won't You Be My Neighbor" about Mr. Rogers and his incredibly good work on behalf of children for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Fred Rogers said: "The world is not always a kind place. That's something all children learn for themselves, whether we want them to or not, but it's something they really need our help to understand."

Ordained Minister of the Gospel Fred Rogers also said: "We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say "It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem." Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes."

God promises that those who cause children to stumble will pay the severest price.

God [through Jesus] declares His absolute solidarity with children.

And God opens his arms wide to children and calls out: "Let them come!!" [value in them as thy are]

... Mark 10:14 Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

You think about that.

Mark 10:13 And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. **14** But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **15** "Truly I say

to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all.*" **16** And He took them in His arms and *began* blessing them, laying His hands on them.

Luke 18:15 And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they *began* rebuking them. **16** But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **17** "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all.*"

Mark 9:33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" **34** But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. **35** Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

Mark 9:36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, **37** "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Mark 9:38 "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

Mark 9:39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, **40** for whoever is not against us is for us. **41** I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

Mark 9:42 "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.

Matt. 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" **2** And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, **3** and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. **4** "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. **5** "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; **6** but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

[For picnic Sunday?????](#)

Sing You Are the Beloved of God & Jesus loves me

“If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person.”

– **Fred Rogers**

“Whether we're a preschooler or a young teen, a graduating college senior or a retired person, we human beings all want to know that we're acceptable, that our being alive somehow makes a difference in the lives of others.”

– **Fred Rogers, The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember**

Phil 1: I thank my God...

“Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like *struggle*. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now.”