



October 5-7, 2024 – Pentecost 20

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: Let the Children Come to Jesus

Sermon Text: Mark 10: 13-16

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Dear children of all ages, children of the Heavenly Father,

Months before summer, little 7-year old Danny was all excited. His mom and dad told him they would take a family trip to Florida. He'd finally meet his cartoon hero in person, Mickey Mouse. The months leading up to the trip seemed to take forever. But, the day arrived when the family drove to Disney World, the home of Mickey Mouse. Danny could hardly believe it. After a few days in the car, there he was, at the gates of Disney, about to meet the larger-than-life mouse for the very first time. Sure, he enjoyed riding *Space Mountain* and the *Tea Cups*. But, all the while, his eyes searched for Mickey. Finally, the moment arrived. He spotted those big ears surrounded by a small crowd of people in a private area, cornered off with rope. As you can imagine, he ran over, but was stopped short by security. They told him: "This is a private meeting for only select people on a list. And if your name isn't on the list, you don't get to meet Mickey. Sorry son." Danny didn't get another chance to meet Mickey. Your heart has to go out to a little boy who came so close, but was turned away by no fault of his own. I hope it this gives you just an idea how parents who brought their little children to see Jesus in our sermon reading for today felt when they were rudely told to go away. But, as we heard "the rest of the story," there was a different ending. We hear that Jesus had His arms wide open saying: **Let the Children Come to Me.** In the words of Mark, chapter 10, Jesus shows His tender love for children – a model to look at and learn from. And then, Jesus points to these children and tells us something more – how to have child-like faith in more than a mouse, but a real life Messiah.

Our sermon reading begins: ***¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*** The disciples learned

something that day. They learned what NOT to do. Their actions invoked a strong human emotion we don't often see in Jesus. Scripture says: **He was indignant**. That means He was angry, ticked off, upset. That shows a rather human side of Jesus who is 100% man as well as 100% God. But, notice this BIG difference. When we get angry, it's often dirty anger. For us, dirty anger often results being impatient, name calling, or even becoming physical. Can you relate? Jesus never had that kind of anger as the perfect Son of God. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us that Jesus was **tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin**. Jesus was going to make right something that was wrong. The Scriptures tell us the kind of anger Jesus expressed that day was something we like to think we always have, but hardly ever express. It's called "righteous anger". Let's take a closer look. First century fathers and mothers bringing their babies and children to Jesus and the disciples scolded them for it. Maybe the disciples felt that Jesus was just too tired to be bothered by little ones. Perhaps, Jesus was in an important conversation and the disciples didn't want Him to be interrupted. And parents, you know what that feels like? You come home from work after an exhausting day, collapse into the nearest chair, only to have a child rocket into your lap. And kids you know how that feels – when you're tugging at mom and dad's arm, trying to get their attention and they tell you: "Shh – just wait and I'll get to you in a minute"? That minute drags on to 15 minutes or longer. Though the disciples thought these parents were wasting the master's time, they couldn't have been more wrong. Jesus sets the wrong right when he extends this divine invitation: **Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these**. Clearly kids are important to Jesus because kids need Jesus. When the Savior looked at their faces, He knew He'd soon die on the cross to save them from their sins. How awesome to know, that Jesus wants you, little kids, big kids, kids of all ages. You may have to be 16 years old to drive a car and 18 years old to vote, but having faith in Jesus has no age requirement. That's another reason we baptize babies as soon as possible. The point? Jesus doesn't want anything or any one to stand between him and you.

And adults, sometimes we can be like those disciples. There's no doubt in my mind that we parents want the best for our children. But, like those same disciples, do we ever assume wrong? Parents have big goals for their kids and will do anything to pursue those goals in education, sports, or music. It amazes me how dedicated some parents are to send their kids away from home when they are little to train full-time for world competition or even the Olympics. Imagine if the same amount of time and money was given to their spiritual training? That begs the question: Parents and grandparents, do we make use of every opportunity to provide for our kids spiritually like we do for music lessons, team practices, or cell phone plans? Do we set the Christian example of regular worship or do other things ever get in the way? How hard it is as Christian parents and grandparents, to see so many of our kids get pulled away from Jesus the older they

become. The devil is not a cartoon character but a real enemy and he works harder on our kids to tempt them with busy schedules and distractions of all shapes and sizes. And he does so with so much success. It's a sad but true statistic that more than half of our 8th graders will likely fall away from regular church attendance within four years. Parents, will your child be one of them? Kids, will you be one of them? Heaven and hell hang in the balance and the devil plays for keeps.

How will our kids make it? Who will help us? Jesus answers those questions and more. In love, He says: **Come to me!** I said the devil plays for keeps, but so does Jesus. And he stands ready to help us with His church. The greatest thing we can give our kids is not just a good education or money in the bank, but the ongoing lesson that sinners are lost forever without Christ and that we are saved by His grace alone. They're questions we should ask ourselves regularly: "It seems like everyone wants their kids to go to Disney, but do we really want our kids and grandkids to go to heaven?" What are we doing about that today. Don't walk. Run to the arms of Jesus who still speaks to us through His Word. Adults, run into the loving arms of Christ who forgives us and helps us communicate Bible truth to our kids, even though they may not always like it. Kids, run to the loving arms of Jesus who forgives and promises to answer every prayer in His name. What a model of love Jesus gave parents when He took the children in His almighty arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them. It's one of the most heart warming pictures in all of Scripture, that is only overshadowed by the awesome display of His love on Good Friday. On that day, instead of wrapping His arms around little children, Jesus lovingly stretched out His blood-stained arms on the cross and died for us. On that day, He lovingly scooped up all our sins, all our failures and paid for them in full and rose again in victory. So **Let the Children Come to Jesus.** See His forgiving love in action.

And Jesus is truly our model to imitate. But, now instead of looking up, look down. Look down right in front of you. Look at our kids, the ones we held as precious little ones. Look at them and see something about faith. The faith of a child is what Jesus wants from us. And that's what the Savior meant when He said in these final words: ¹⁵ ***I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*** If you've ever cradled a baby in your arms, you can't help but marvel at how tiny their fingers and toes are. They're totally helpless, totally dependent on others to feed, clothe, and change them. Even as kids get older, they still depend on loving parents to take care of them. This is the kind of faith God wants – it's the faith of a child that pulls up a chair to God's table and simply receives the free gift of God's grace without being expected to contribute or add anything. It's a childlike faith not based on age, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, that simply trusts in Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.

The opposite of a childlike faith is a childish faith, a selfish faith, one that doesn't care about anything or anyone else. You know what that looks like: just take one toy and two toddlers and watch the war wage. Instead, Christ calls us to have the faith of a child ... to simply believe Him without seeing. It reminds us of a little boy who was camping and scared of the dark. He woke up in the middle of the night. He couldn't see anything, including his parents who were sleeping in the same cabin. With panic rising in his voice, he called out: "Daddy – are you there?" "Yes, I am" replied his sleepy father. "But, daddy, is your face towards me?" The familiar voice of his father responded: "Yes, I'm looking right at you." Just hearing His father's voice made the boy feel safe and secure. Our faith needs that kind of assurance. We need to hear our Heavenly Father's voice. This Fall, keep coming to church week in and week out to hear God speaking to us, to make us strong and secure. And bring your kids and grandkids. Our kids need our example and we need to hear the voice of our Father in Heaven.

Maybe that little boy at the beginning of my sermon didn't get to shake the hand of Micky Mouse. But, if he had been one of those little ones who came to Jesus in Mark, chapter 10, he wouldn't have been disappointed. Come to think of it, for the last 17 minutes, we've been sitting in Jesus' lap. We've been listening to how much Jesus loves us and how He has prepared heaven for us. We'll never outgrow our need for Jesus. My friends, remember Jesus is talking directly to us when he says: "Let the Children come to me." Amen.