Title: *Let the Children Come* Homecrest PC

Scripture: *Mark 10:2-16* 10/7/18

 If someone comes up and asks you to sum up your understanding of the Christian faith in one or two sentences, what would you say? Where do you begin? Well, that was exactly the challenge that the famous 20th century contemporary theologian Karl Barth faced after he had given a lecture on the campus of the University of Chicago in 1962. During the Q & A session, a student stood up and asked Karl Barth if he could summarize his whole life’s work in theology in one sentence. Well, Karl Barth paused for a moment and then calmly spoke into the microphone “***Yes, I can. In the words of a song I learned at my mother’s knee: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”***

 Wow, what a simple yet profound response! You would think you would know that, if you’ve ever attended Sunday School…but how many of us truly understand what that really means and to put it into our practice in our everyday lives. *“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so”?*

 Come to think of it, there’s a lot that we can learn from the days of our youth or through the eyes of a child. It is much easier, less stressful and worrisome, if we were a child. Imagine how different we would all be in seeing the world and how we would treat one another through the eyes of a child…with less cynicism, less judgment and criticism. We are more freed to express our joy, our hope, our passion and enthusiasm about our future. We would use our God-given imagination and creativity in order to dream and to think more outside the box.

 During my recent trip out west in Canada, I got to spend some time with my cousin’s two young kids who were 10 and 6. Over the years, I got to see them grow and mature. Whenever I see them, I always get them a little something. This time I got the younger boy, who’s 6 years old, a puzzle set that requires some assembly. The recommended age for that puzzle is age 7+. I figure he’s a smart boy and he can probably figure it out. Well, certainly he did not disappoint me. He was able to assemble it all together with only a small help from his dad. It was a puzzle that can be transformed into a robot AND also a car and he didn’t have to follow the instruction that was attached. That boy had the ability to imagine what it could be, just by looking at the picture. Sometimes I wish that we, adults, can learn through the eyes of a little child, where we can play freely, exercising our imagination and creativity.

 In the gospel lesson that we read earlier, Jesus was challenged by a group of Pharisees into taking a stand on upholding the values and principles of tradition versus ethics and moralities. The context in which Jesus was being challenged came in the form of a man divorcing his wife in marriage and also the role of children in society. Both of these groups (the women and the children) were historically considered powerless, voiceless, and marginalized groups in a patriarchal society. Well, doesn’t that ring a bell even in 2018 today when many of the rights of the women and children are also being violated.

The Pharisees posed the question to Jesus should divorce be granted under the various circumstances as outlined in the Law of Moses, as God had intended marriage to be a lifelong commitment. Whose mandate and law do we follow? These questions were being set up by the Pharisees in order to trap Jesus and then charge him for heresy.

The issue here isn’t about whether a divorce can be granted, or what is permissible under the law. **The main issue is by whose authority do we follow**? Do we honor the Moses’s Law or do we honor God’s intended covenant of marriage as established under the law? In other word, while dissolution of marriage may be permissible, under extenuating circumstances, it may not be what God had intended for. **Jesus was not-as concerned about what is (or what isn’t) allowed under the law, but instead he was more concerned about what God has intended for God’s kingdom, where mercy and grace triumph over judgement.** He was more concerned about one’s spiritual welfare rather than upholding what is legalistic and lawful.

Jesus was more concerned about those who are being marginalized and oppressed, those without power or whose voices being silenced. If he didn’t speak up, who would? He was not to be intimated in speaking against a system of injustice laws that were created to protect the power of those who hold it.

Once again, Jesus seized the opportunity and turned it into a teaching moment for his disciples and his followers. Jesus emphasized the importance of honoring the covenant vow that one took upon marriage, the same way that Christ committed Himself in honoring the unity of the body where the church is the bride and Christ is the bridegroom. Jesus remains faithful to us time after time even if we may have been unfaithful to him and to one another.

In addressing these moral and ethical issues of his time, Jesus ultimately invited us to contemplate on the issue of authority. By whose authority do we embrace and show mercy upon one another? By whose authority do we render judgment and repute one another? Is it by OUR human authority or by God’s? Who are we to determine who ultimately belongs and who doesn’t, in the Kingdom of God? *Let anyone who has no sins be the first to cast the stone.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Furthermore, besides the women, Jesus also addressed our relationship and our view towards children. What role do the children play within the Kingdom of God? How shall we enter the Kingdom of God like the little children? What did Jesus mean when he proclaimed that ***“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to them.”***

More than 50 years ago, a young aspiring Presbyterian named Fred Rogers would certainly agree with this vision when he felt God’s call in launching the television series “*Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood*” that captivated the audience transcending all generations and cultures, while sensitively addressing many of the controversial adult and worldly issues through the eyes and the ears of children. This all took place during a time of civil discourse and progressive movement of the 60’s and 70’s.

 What about now? Perhaps in times such as these, that we ought to pause and refocus, rededicate our faith and our mission…to think and to act innocently like children once again.

 **To be like little children is to be pure and simple and to be obedient to our parents, not only to our earthly parents but also to our heavenly parent as well. So, what does it all mean, when we are called to be “child-like”?**

1. **Sharing Our Resources**

 **First, to be “child-like” means that we are to share what we have with others.** Just like when we were in kindergarten, we must learn to play fairly and that we must **SHARE** what we have with others. That’s probably Rule #1. Certainly the Kingdom of God is not meant to be an exclusive and elite society, or by invitations or for “members only.” Everybody is on the same leveled playing field. Everybody belongs. We don’t set the rules, God does. No one should be looking down upon the others. **We are to extend our invitation and welcome others by sharing our resources all around us**, just like sharing our toys with our friends during play time.

 **B) SIMPLE Faith in God**

 Second, Jesus told us that the Kingdom of God requires a **SIMPLE faith, like that of a little child with the faith of a mustard seed.** Have you ever noticed that children, especially the young ones, have very **simplistic and innocent minds**? They would ask questions that might seem so trivial to us, yet they were well intended and the child meant what he or she says.

 God has entrusted us to cultivate and to play in this “playground” freely. God wants us to play freely. The world is much more fun, less complicated, and less stressful with worries through the eyes of children.

 I believe **this is the mindset that God wants us to take on, as we approach the Kingdom of God** - **to be simple, yet genuine and pure truthful to our faith in God.**

 **C) Being Child-Like does not mean being Childish**

 **Thirdly, being “child-like” does not mean that we are to be “childish”.** As much as we would like to remain as a child at times, we must move on to maturity and to learn to take on the greater responsibility and restraining our emotions and thoughts as adults. This is part of being a spiritual grown-up. Scripture reminds us that we must ***leave our elementary teachings about Christ behind and go on to maturity*[[2]](#footnote-2)** As the Apostle Paul also wrote, *“When we were a child, we spoke like a child, we thought like a child, we reasoned like a child; when we became an adult, we [must] put an end to [our] childish ways.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Christ has opened the gate of God’s Kingdom wide opened for anyone who believes and embraces the Good News. We’ve all received the same invitation to come to the same table of grace, as we will later on when we participate in the Holy Communion of Christ. This is Christ’s Thanksgiving meal for us to share with others.

 In times like these when everything seems to have turned upside down and inside out, when we have more questions, uncertainties and unknowns, than answers. We turn to God for answers! God invites us to stand firm together in the unity of our faith and continue to trust in God even when we do not have all the answers as clearly defined and when the Kingdom of God may seem farfetched. But the kingdom of God is here and present among us, as we embrace our differences and fulfill God’s purpose as one body in Christ.

 As the Apostle Paul reminded the early church that we shall fix our eyes on the eternal glory of God, *for this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

 So **“*Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”***

 As we prepare our hearts to come before the Table on this *World Communion Sunday*, may we once again be reminded that we are NEVER alone. We honor God’s presence along with our fellow sisters and brothers who are both near and afar around the world. We are joined by the company of saints who have come before us and for the generations to come. One day all of God’s children will be united in the presence of God, feasting at this very same table of grace and love.

 ***Jesus loves us (this much we know), for the Bible tells us so. Little ones to Him belong, we are weak but He is strong.***The word of God never fails us. So come, children of God. Come and feast at the table of grace and reconciliation. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *John 8:7* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Hebrew 6:1* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *I Corinthians 13:11* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *2 Corinthians 4:17-18* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)