



Sermon Title: Childlike (Not Childish)

Mark 10:13-16

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Well, good morning, BelPres. Good morning. My name is Annie Duncan. I'm the Executive Pastor here, and as always, it is wonderful to be with you and worship this morning. This summer, we are walking through the Gospel of Mark together as a church family. So we're going to read the scripture this morning, which comes from Mark 10, "People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 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. Truly, I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God, like a little child, will never enter it. And he took the children in his arms and he placed his hands on them and blessed them."

Well, this story illustrates yet again how the disciples keep on missing it and they keep on messing it up. They hang out with Jesus all the time, but they keep on missing what Jesus is about and what his kingdom is all about. And so the story that we just read, it starts off by saying that people were bringing their tiny little kids, like so small that even babies had to be carried to Jesus so that Jesus would put his hands on them and bless them. And the disciples thinking that they were doing the right thing, tried to dismiss the parents and the kids by saying, "Jesus doesn't have time for you." And while this seems harsh culturally, the disciples thought that they were doing the right thing. In Jesus' day, childhood was seen as this unavoidable age between birth and adulthood. Where it was this time before one could learn a trade or participate in household chores or if you were a boy, start studying the Torah.

So it made sense why the disciples trying to shoo that parents and kids away that thought that they were doing the right thing because culturally that's what any other teacher or rabbi would've wanted them to do. Don't bother me until you're of age, right? But not Rabbi Jesus. So in a shocking turn of events, not only does Jesus get angry at his disciples for trying to send the kids away, but he takes this group of tiny little children and babies that normally would've been disregarded and dismissed and says that the kind of kingdom he's bringing belongs to such as these. And anyone who can't receive it like a

little child will never enter it. In true Gospel of Mark fashion. Mark immediately follows this story by contrasting it with the story about a rich young man.

So keep reading with me. "As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. Good teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus replied, you know the commandments. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall defraud and honor your father and mother. Teacher, he declared all of these, I have kept since I was a boy. And Jesus looked at him and loved him. One thing you lack, he said, go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me. At this, the man's face fell and he went away sad because he had great wealth."

So this rich man with all of his possessions and his status is a stark contrast to the story about the little children. And Mark does this intentionally to drive a point home about the kingdom of God. So let's look at these two stories side by side. First, the children are dependent, whereas the man is independent. The children depended on their parents and adults to carry them around, to feed them, to wash them. But the rich young man, he independently can walk around and feed himself and independently he ran to Jesus and fell at Jesus' feet. He was eager to be one of Jesus' disciples. Let's continue. So the little children, they weren't blessed for what they have, but what they lack, and again, during Jesus' day, this perception of kids was that they didn't add any value to the household until they could contribute something. So Jesus blessing little children in this way underscores how the kingdom of God isn't based on anything we've done or anything we bring, but it's based on what God has already done. In contrast, the rich young man thinks that he is blessed because of what he's done.

And Jesus surprises him by saying that there's one thing that he lacks. And that is probably the very first time that this young man has heard that he is lacking in anything. I mean, just look at him. He's got a lot going on, right? He says that he's followed all these commandments since he was a boy. So that means he hasn't murdered anybody. He hasn't stolen anything. He hasn't committed fraud. He has a good relationship with his parents and he's got all this cash to back it up. I mean, he could be on the Christian bachelor if there was such a thing, right? And yet Jesus says that he is lacking something. What could that be, right? And here's where our third comparison comes into play. Whereas the little children are brought to Jesus and Jesus is adamant about that. He says, "Do not keep them from me."

Jesus sends the young man away. But before Jesus sends the young man away, scripture tells us that Jesus looks at him and loves him. Jesus looks at him and loves him because he sees the man's heart. He sees that he's working so hard and trying so hard to do what he understands to be the next right thing. So it's out of Jesus' great love for this young man that he knows that there's still something keeping him from living the life that Jesus would want him to live. And the thing that the man lacks is humility and dependence. So Jesus tells him to sell everything, give it to the poor and sends him away. But then after he's done that, Jesus invites him to come back. Come back and follow me. The very invitation that the man was eager to receive. And of all those that Jesus invited to follow him.

You think about the handful of fishermen, the tax collector and others, we are told that they dropped everything and followed Jesus. But the rich young man, he didn't drop everything to follow Jesus. After this story, we don't hear from him again. And maybe that's because of his great wealth. It took him a while to obey what Jesus had asked him to do, or maybe his wealth was too hard to let go of. So the radical thing about reading these stories back to back, Jesus and the little children and the rich young man, is that the kingdom Jesus is announcing is for those who are more like the little children than the rich young man. And I think especially here in Bellevue, we read the story about the rich young man and outwardly he appears to have everything going for him, because he's so capable. And yet, in looking at these two stories, I think I can relate to the rich young man more than I can relate to the little children.

I like to follow the rules. I like to check the boxes. I like to receive the metaphorical gold star, right? Well done, you. But the more we are like the rich young man, independent and thinking that we can earn Jesus' love and earn our way to heaven, the more we miss out on the kingdom that Jesus is all about. So if being childlike is such a vital and important aspect of accessing the kingdom of God, then let's unpack it a little bit more. Because I wonder if there are some of you like me that maybe resonate more with the rich young ruler and are convicted of, okay, how am I to be childlike then? And Jesus means childlike not childish. There is a difference. We're not called to be childish. We all know what it means to be childish. There's a difference. So knowing what we know about Jesus and the kingdom of God that he's announcing, how are we to be childlike?

Well, first, we are to be dependent. To be childlike and dependent means that we are never too grown up that we forget our dependence on Jesus as one who guides us, convicts us, corrects us, encourages us, nurtures us. And Jesus says that this type of posture is required for accessing the kingdom of God to be dependent and childlike. And in describing it this way, Jesus remains consistent with the kingdom that he is announcing. In the Beatitudes, we hear him bless the marginalized, the least of these, the hungry, the thirsty, the meek, and those who mourn. And the poor and those who are persecuted, Jesus blesses by announcing that theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So in the Beatitudes and now here with the little children, Jesus is announcing a kingdom that nobody saw coming, nobody expected, a kingdom for those that were down and out, a kingdom for those that were disregarded and overlooked.

Being dependent and childlike means taking a real assessment with how we're actually doing. It's asking the question, am I really trying to earn God's love or work my way into heaven? Or do I actually acknowledge that I'm desperate and in need of a savior? Last week was BelPres' Vacation Bible Adventure, where we had close to 300 kids and close to 200 leaders here on our campus. It was a week filled with joy, just watching little kids run around and be discipled and learn more about Jesus. But picture this for a second, and imagine that there were no leaders here during the week of VBA. The week would've looked a lot different, right? I mean, this place may have been burnt to the ground. I don't know if there is no leaders here. Without leaders, VBA would've looked a lot different because kids rely on leaders not just for safety, but to provide care for them, to make sure that they drink water and stay hydrated when it's so crazy hot here in Seattle, but also to answer questions kids might have about who Jesus is.

And as grownups, we too need leaders in our lives like Jesus, like a community of brothers and sisters in Christ to depend on, to hold us accountable, to get us back on course if we fall off track. We never outgrow our need for dependence on Jesus and Christian community to continue to grow as disciples. So to get real for a second, ask yourself this question, when was the last time that gospel convicted you? If it's been a while, you might be doing it wrong. If there's something keeping you from growing closer to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is going to reveal that to you and invite you to live a different way. And this happens over time and through relationship. The Holy Spirit doesn't just download this long laundry list of all the things that you're doing wrong. No, just like the rich young man was given one thing to do, and while it was a big thing, go and sell everything, it was just one thing to do.

We too are invited to listen to the Holy Spirit, to be convicted and receive that invitation to live differently. And the root of our need to depend on Jesus is relationship. Jesus doesn't want to leave us to our own vices because he knows that we are better when we remain attached to him, tethered to him, remain in his love. And in the Gospel of John, Jesus describes himself as the true vine. He says that we are to remain attached to him. He says, "Remain in me as I remain in you." Just like a leaf on a vine. If it gets separated from that vine, it's going to wither. Jesus knows that we too will wither if we are left on our own too long. To enter into the kingdom of God the way that Jesus announces it, is to acknowledge our utter dependence on him.

So while the first example of being childlike is us being dependent on Jesus, the second example of being childlike is understanding that Jesus is not dependent on us. We can come to him empty-handed. It is not about what we've done for Jesus, but all about what he has done for us. And we receive Jesus' love as a gift. And looking at empty hands is a great visual reminder that helps us understand the nature of the kingdom of God, that there's nothing that we do to earn it. It's a gift. And kids understand this nature of gifts a lot better than us adults do because kids don't have a lot to give, but really understand what it means to receive gifts. And this weekend, my mom and I went over to my brother and sister-in-law's house to hang out with my two nieces and nephew who are all under the age of six.

And I bought them a gift, a splash pad, and I brought it over to their house. If you don't know what a splash pad is, it is exactly what it sounds like. You hook it up to a hose and it fills with two inches of water. And kids just have fun and splash around in it. And as soon as we got to their house, my nieces and nephew, they know be on the lookout for gifts from Auntie. And they saw in my bag a box that had a splash pad in it, right? And they're like, oh. So immediately we went outside, we hooked it up to the hose, and for the next two hours, which is a long time to keep kids entertained. I know that you guys understand that. For the next two hours we played and we splashed around. Needless to say they received that gift really well. And guess what they gave me?

Because I gave them a gift, so they had to give me a gift, right? Guess what they gave me? Nothing. No, they didn't give me anything. It wasn't even on their radar to think, oh, Auntie just gave us something. We need to give her something. But that's not why I gave them a gift, right? Not to get anything into return, but to watch them play and see the sheer joy on their faces as they splashed around. And that gives us just a glimpse into the

heart of the Father who gives us great gifts, not expecting anything in return. When we think we need to earn it, we miss the point completely. But when we receive it with empty hands, like my nieces and nephew, with sheer joy, knowing that gifts of unconditional love don't need any reciprocation. There's a song that we sing in here often Jireh, which means the Lord provides, and it illustrates this empty hands posture.

And the lyrics start off the song with this. It says, "I've never been more loved than I am right now. I wasn't holding you up, so there's nothing I can do to let you down. It doesn't take a trophy to make you proud. I've never been more loved than I am right now."

Do you all believe that? We sing it all the time. But do you believe in that kind of radical love? Like a kid that might not have a lot to give, we come to Jesus childlike, not listing our accomplishments and everything that we've done for him and everything that we bring to him, but we come empty-handed knowing that there is nothing that we can do to make Jesus love us more. And there's nothing that we can do to make Jesus love us any less. We have never been more loved than we are right now.

So we depend on Jesus love. Man, whenever I talk about Jesus' love, whoo gets the tear ducts going. We depend on Jesus' love, but Jesus' love is not dependent on us, not dependent on what we do or don't do. So we can be childlike by understanding our utter dependence on Jesus. By coming empty-handed, receiving Jesus' love as a sheer gift. And third, we are childlike when we recognize our need to be carried to Jesus. Just like the little children in this story, they were so small and tiny that they literally needed to be carried to Jesus. Sometimes we too in our journey as disciples, need to be carried to Jesus. Like the story in the gospel is about the paralyzed man whose friends carried him to Jesus so that he could get healed. Other times, we are metaphorically carried to Jesus through prayer, through accountability, through our friends saying, "Hey, Annie, something seems off. I'm going to be praying for you." Right?

Jesus calls us to live a life that we cannot live apart from him. And he calls us to live a life we cannot live apart from each other. So during hard times, our Christian community, our brothers and sisters in Christ, they can be the ones that stand in the gap for us and believe for us when we find it hard to believe. They can carry us through difficult times, helping us know that we're not alone. A few weeks before my mother-in-law passed away... I didn't cry in my office when I was going through this story. She called me. So cancer took her too quickly. But a few weeks before she died, she called me. She was a follower of Jesus. And now she reflected on her life. She had all these questions. She totally understood her dependence on Jesus as her savior.

But in some of her questions, I heard fear that, oh, Annie, I haven't done enough. I haven't done enough. And as I listened to her questions and just sat with her for a while and listened to her fear, I helped her to see that she was believing in a conditional love that Jesus had for her. Which as we prayed and as we read through scripture, we were able to remind each other of gosh, how radical it is that Jesus' love actually isn't conditional. It's unconditional. And that fear dissipated. And I think during those final days of my mother-in-law's life, as I've been reflecting on that, it gives us this glimpse into what a kingdom-like child-like life is where we depend on Jesus for everything. And we depend on each other to carry us through when we don't have the strength to. So how have others done that for you, literally or metaphorically?

How have you carried others to Jesus? Knowing that we can rely on one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is one of the greatest gifts of Christian community. So this week, don't be childish, but be child-like. And remember that we are welcomed into God's kingdom by being child-like, depending on Jesus, admittance into his kingdom with nothing but empty hands and being carried by our friends if we have to. And this week, as you continue to think about, gosh, how can I be more child-like and less like the independent, rich young man, here is a child-like action step. This week, pray and ask Jesus, what game do you want to play with me? And listen for what Jesus might say. It might surprise you. It might fill you with joy. It might remind you of your child-like self from years ago. And if you find it hard to hear Jesus' voice, that's okay.

Others can listen on your behalf. Maybe Jesus wants to play a game of catch with you, maybe wants to sit down and put together a puzzle with you. Whatever it is, take time to listen for what Jesus might say. Jesus welcomes all our questions, but we don't always have to ask Jesus super-serious questions. So this week, ask a question to Jesus, the one who loves us from a child-like posture. Jesus, what game do you want to play with me? Let's pray.

Jesus, it is in this child-like posture that we come to you and we ask that question, God, what game do you want to play with us? And as silly as that sounds, God, we do want to be disciples. We want to enter your kingdom. And God, we thank you that the kingdom that you are all about is so different than what we see around us. We thank you that we get to come into your kingdom with empty hands receiving your kingdom as a gift. So this week help us to live out that childlike faith. We thank you that your love never ceases to amaze us. We love you, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Why does Jesus say that the Kingdom of God needs to be "received?"

- The little children are blessed not because of what they have, but what they lack. What strikes you about this point?
- Read Mark 10:17-22 and compare/contrast the two stories.
- The little children were carried to Jesus. Describe a time when you were, literally or metaphorically, "carried to Jesus."

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.