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 World Communion

Living as Children of God
Mark 10:13-16

*People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was **indignant** and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that **the kingdom of God belongs**. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not **receive the kingdom of God as a little child** will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

Why would Jesus say we should enter the kingdom of God *like children*?

Ever spent time as an adult, trying to think like a child?
 Wonder what happens when ***adults are encouraged to be childlike***?
 Psychologist Michael Robinson conducted an experiment about that, he randomly assigned a few hundred undergraduates to two different groups. The first group was given the following instructions:
"You are seven-years-old, and school is canceled. You have the entire day to yourself. What would you do? Where would you go? Who would you see?"

The second group was given the exact same instructions, except the first sentence was deleted—
they didn't imagine themselves as seven-year-olds with school canceled—only that they had a day to themselves.

After writing for ten minutes, the subjects in both groups were given various ***tests of creativity***, such as trying to invent alternative uses for an ***old car tire***, or listing all the things one could do with a ***brick***. Interestingly, the students who imagined themselves as ***young kids scored far higher*** on the creative tasks, coming up with ***twice as many ideas*** as the other group.

Children are full of ***wonder, curiosity, and creativity!***

They also have such ***pure love and joy.***

The famous cellist, *Yo-Yo Ma* says, "When people ask me how they should approach performance, I always tell them that the professional musician should aspire to the state of the *beginner*...

Because why is that kid playing? He is playing for *pleasure*.

He is playing because making this sound, expressing this melody, makes him *happy*. That is still the only good reason to play."

Jonah Lehrer, *Imagine* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), pp. 110-111

Children can also be quite honest, saying what adults won't.

Ellen Decker tells about her 5 year old son offering the following prayer during family time: "*Dear Jesus, sorry for the mess we made in the yard today.*" After a slight pause, he concluded, "*Thank you for the fun we had doing it.*"

Ellen Decker, Pennsylvania. *Today's Christian Woman*, Vol. 18, no. 4.

What would happen to *our relationship with God*—
if we allowed such childlike wonder, joy, and honesty?

Can you imagine having a childlike faith?

What does that look like in *our lives*?

How could we start to live that way?

Art Linkletter used to say, "*Kids say the darndest things.*"

But in the passage today, it is *Jesus* who says the most amazing things.

And what He says is not only about *children*

but about *each one of us, for we are children of God.*

In order to understand the *full impact* of Jesus' words we have to understand the *role of children in Jesus' day.*

Children were considered a *blessing*,

Jewish parents would take them to a Rabbi for blessing,

They were an important part of family life,

but *NOT in the way we think today.*

Children were considered to be *property* of the father,
and useful if they could help sustain the family *economy*.

sometimes after age 7 children were treated as miniature adults,

and certainly by puberty they were given the *same responsibilities* as adults.

http://www.academia.edu/1004684/History_of_the_Treatment_of_and_Attitudes_toward_Children

A good number of children

in those days didn't live past childhood.

Conditions were *harsh*.

And children were not the *treasures* we consider them today.

The book *A History of Children* talks about how a baby could be *abandoned* without penalty or social stigma for many reasons, including poor appearance, being illegitimate, coming from poverty, or simply being one of too many children. ... Such an infant was considered an *unclaimed thing*.

If picked up by wealthy persons, the child could become a slave, or a play companion, ...It wasn't really until *Christianity* took hold that things changed, especially for Roman children. Christianity taught that *children were gifts* from God, and therefore harm to a child was a violation of God's will.

Gradually, Christian Roman emperors increased the penalties for *abandoning* children, and they limited the number of years a child could be *enslaved* to just five years." *A History of Children: A Socio-cultural Survey Across Millennia*, by A.R. Colón with P.A. Colón, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT (2001), pp. 104-106.

Basically, children in Jesus' day were the most *vulnerable* members of society.

They were completely *dependent upon adults*—just to exist!

They had to live by *trusting* people around them.

So, what if that's precisely *why Jesus offers them* as a model for us?
And why this passage is so important to us.

What if we too are called to be *vulnerable, trusting, and dependent*
Totally dependent upon God!

Think about our conversations the past few weeks about Sailboats.

Isn't *trust and dependence* what it takes to sail—

relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit to fill our sails
and help us be Christ-followers?

(instead of relying on ourselves as rowboats?)

Jesus says we should receive the *kingdom of God like a child*—
we should be *child-like* in our faith.

Jesus does NOT say we should be immature.

In other words, we should receive the kingdom with
the *attitude* of a child,
the *perspective* of a child,
and the *trust* of a child.

What if Jesus is calling us to be just as *vulnerable* and *dependent* and *trusting* as children in his day had to be?

What if instead of being “*pull yourself up* by your bootstraps” adults,
We are supposed to be *trusting and dependent*—upon God?
What if instead of being *SELF-sufficient*,
We are to be *GOD-sufficient*?

In her book, *Sailboat Church*,
Joan Gray talks about how we as Christians become sailors with Jesus.
She says we do it by *depending and receiving*.
We *depend* on God—for everything.
And we *receive* the Holy Spirit.

All of which runs *counter to our culture*,
Where we are in control,
And we depend upon no one, except ourselves.
We are *running* the show,
And constantly *giving* of ourselves.
Gray reminds us that we are called to *RECEIVE* the gifts of God,
Especially that power of the Holy Spirit!

But ask yourself--*Are you better at giving or receiving?*
Many of us struggle with *receiving*, don't we?
Because that's when the ball is not in our court—
that's when we have to loosen our grip, open our hearts and hands.
It can be *hard to receive*—whether it's a compliment,
a gift, or some help when times are tough.
We have to be *vulnerable* to receive from someone else.

Could that be the point Jesus is making?
That we are called to *believe and receive*?
What if that's our identity as children of God?

What would that mean, practically?
It could mean letting go.
I mean, we can't open our hands to receive,
if we have a tight grip on something else.
But *what if letting go is not our forte*?

Jesus uses the term *receive* when he says, *whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.*

The kingdom is not something we create or control.

It is a ***GIFT to receive.***

And the *gifts of God—they are abundant, amazing, and miraculous.*

What if this is another way we are to receive like children?

Think about the last time you saw *a child open a gift*---it usually involves big eyes, smiles, laughter, and joy---even if they love the box more than the contents, right?

The gifts of God are also just *enough.*

In Exodus 16 the Israelites are wandering in the wilderness, and they are hungry.

So, they cry out to God for help.

And God literally provides *food from heaven*---

manna, a bread-like substance that was on the ground at dawn, and quail, for meat, at night.

But there were *specific instructions about the manna.*

It was abundant.

Everyone could gather as much as they needed.

But it was only good for *that day.*

God actually warned them that saving manna for the future would cause it to *rot.*

And it did.

Think about that lesson.

When do we let go and let God provide?

Do we approach God as God's children---trusting that God will give us enough?

Or do we try to store up what we have, hoard it for ourselves, and secure our own future?

We usually choose the latter.

If we want to receive the kingdom,

We've got to be like children,

Like the Israelites.

We've got to ***trust God—completely.***

We've got to ***depend on God—without reservation.***

Gray says in her book that the ***whole point of church*** is to ***Trust Jesus and become a disciple*** of Him.

In other words, we are called to *depend and receive*.
That's how we become more and more like Christ.
And it all *starts with child-like faith*.

In some ways *learning to trust God is simple*.
You just do it.
You believe and receive.
We adults *make faith so complicated*, don't we?

What if we *tried to have that child-like faith* that Jesus encourages?

Take prayer.

Some of the best prayers are kids' prayers.
Ever heard a child pray?
It's beautiful—real, down to earth, and simple.
No extra stuff.
Like this:

Dear God, are you really invisible, or that just a trick?—Lucy

Dear God, I didn't think that orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool. —Eugene

Dear God, I don't ever feel alone since I found out about you--Nora

How is YOUR prayer life?

If you could give it a score, on a scale of 1-not good to 10-really good,
what would you say?
Very few of us would say 10, right?

So what do we do?
We pray.
We just do it.
We believe and receive.
We go to God in total dependence.
Because that is TRUTH—we need God, for absolutely everything!
And we *find what we need in prayer*.

We also find childlike faith when we
participate in the body of Christ on earth, the church,

just like we talked about last week in 1 Corinthians 12.
 We need community to help us *learn how to depend* on God.
 We need one another to *encourage us to believe and receive the Holy Spirit*.

On a scale of 1-10, *how is your life in the body of Christ?*
 How can you make it stronger?

We also find our way as children receiving the kingdom
 when we turn to the *Bible*.

Gray calls studying the Bible *'marinating' in Scripture!*

Joan Gray, *Sailboat Church*, Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2014, Pg. 45

Isn't that a great image?

Think about that the next time you make dinner—

how can I *marinate in Scripture?*

How can we spend time in it, ask questions of it, memorize it,
 and study it together?

Just think of what marinating in the Bible would do for us—

It could literally change us in ways we can hardly imagine!

So, as we go—let's make a commitment-- to have faith like children.

To be *trusting, vulnerable, dependent* upon God,

Instead of ourselves!

To pray, to participate, to marinate in the Bible!

We can all *learn so much from children*,

And as a church we are so blessed by them!

Their perspective can change our lives, and our church,

if we *learn from them, how to receive* the kingdom of God.

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel*:

May God give us the strength and courage *to let go*,

Believe, and receive the kingdom, like a child.

For this, all God's children can say together: Amen.