

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 19, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 627 (240:4) 302, 630, 628:4-5

Lessons: Isaiah 12; Acts 3:1-16; Luke 18:15-17.

Sermon Text: Mark 10:13-16.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ,

Should we be concerned about little children and what they know and believe about Jesus? Some would answer: Children are too young to think about spiritual matters. Should not the very young, especially, be left alone to play and not be bothered about religion? Isn't there plenty of time for them to learn about religious matters later in life? After all, what should children know about such things when their reasoning ability is not yet mature?

These and similar objections might be in the minds of people who have never learned what our text teaches. It is surely evident from the words of our text that Jesus does not agree with such objections. Let us hear Jesus' words and learn about,

LITTLE CHILDREN AND THE LORD'S KINGDOM

- 1. The Lord wants little children to be brought to him;**
- 2. The Lord wants adults to be like little children in their faith.**

While Jesus was busy teaching, our text says, ***“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.”*** The parents of these children, most likely the mothers, kept bringing their children to Jesus so that he could touch them. Surely they did not do this because of some superstitious belief that the touch of Jesus' hands had some magical power. Jesus would not have allowed this. They wanted Jesus to bless their children. But the disciples tried to prevent the mothers from coming to Jesus. They talked against the idea. Maybe they believed that Jesus should not be bothered with little children while he was teaching the people.

“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.’” When Jesus saw that the disciples were trying to keep the mothers from bringing their children to him, he was much displeased. He resented what his disciples were doing. Jesus very quickly let his disciples know that they were in the wrong. ***“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.”*** Let the little children be brought to me and do not try to prevent them from coming. We here have a very clear teaching of Jesus about little children. Our text does not indicate either that children must be of a certain age before they are brought to Jesus. In fact, the Scriptures use a word in the original Greek, which includes babies or infants. Jesus wants the little ones to be brought to him.

Our text also is not an isolated statement about little children and how they should learn about the Lord. When Moses was giving his last instructions to the people before he died, he told them that periodically they should gather all the people together, ***“men, women and children,”*** Deuteronomy 31:12, so they could listen to what the Lord had commanded them, ***“and learn to fear the LORD,”*** Deuteronomy 31:13. The psalmist speaks of teaching the children the Word of God, saying, ***“We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the***

next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children,” Psalm 78:4-6. When the risen Savior commanded Peter to nourish and feed the flock of God’s people, he also included the little ones, saying, **“Feed my lambs,”** John 21:15. When Peter preached to the people on Pentecost about repentance and baptism, he said, **“The promise is for you and your children,”** Acts 2:39.

Why is it that the Lord Jesus is so concerned about little children? Why was he angry when the disciples tried to keep the children from coming to him? The answer, first of all, is that little children need to come to Jesus to be saved. Little babies are not born without sin. They are not pure and innocent. Jesus teaches, **“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit,”** John 3:6. That is to say, little children that are born of sinful parents are sinful when they are born. They are in need of spiritual salvation or they will be lost forever in hell. The second reason why Jesus is concerned about little children is that he specifically says in our text, **“the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”** What does that mean? We have to know or be reminded again of the nature of God’s kingdom. The Lord’s kingdom is not like any earthly kingdom with an area of land and a number of people ruled over by a king. It is not a visible organization. It is spiritual in nature. In the Lord’s Prayer we pray **“Thy kingdom come.”** Our Catechism explains how this is done: *“When our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word, and lead a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity.”* Our Catechism also teaches, *“The kingdom of God is God’s rule in the interest of His Church.”* The Lord clearly says in our text that little children can also come to faith and believe in Jesus so he can rule in their hearts.

The next matter we should consider is how faith can be worked in the hearts of little children so that they can believe. How is it that the Lord can also rule in the hearts of little children? As with adults so with children. The Holy Spirit through the power of the Gospel word creates faith in the heart. In the case of little infants who cannot yet be instructed, the Lord has provided Holy Baptism as a means of grace. How can the water of Baptism do this? Luther answers in the Catechism, *“It is not the water that does them indeed, but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word of God in the water.”* Also the Bible says, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,”** Mark 16:16. Paul calls baptism **“the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,”** Titus 3:5. Paul also writes, **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ,”** Galatians 3:26-27. This working of faith through Baptism to make little children also children of God is done by the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, **“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God,”** 1 Corinthians 6:11.

We as parents should learn from Jesus in our text that our children should be brought to Jesus. We do that by bringing our infant children to be baptized. But what then? Should we then forget about our children’s spiritual welfare until they are old enough to go to school? No, as soon as the little ones can be taught anything, they should be taught about Jesus and what he did for them. They should learn how Jesus suffered and died for them on the cross to redeem them from all their sins. They should learn about **“Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,”** 1 John 2:1-2. Little children should be taught that Jesus loves them and wants them to have eternal life in heaven. How important it is for parents to see to it that their children can learn God’s Word at home. The father, since he is the head of the household, has the main responsibility to teach his children, and the mother also should do all she can to teach her little ones. Little children should be taught at home how to fold their hands and pray. They should learn the Bible stories in simple language. They should be taught at home to sit still in church and show respect for the house of worship. They should learn that the Word of God is very precious and important. Later on they can be instructed in Sunday School or a Christian Day School and receive confirmation instructions, and after confirmation also learn in Bible Class.

We dare not forget what Jesus did after he spoke about the little ones being brought to him. ***“He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”*** Jesus’ words of blessing were not meaningless words, but words of spiritual blessing. We can be assured that when we bring our little ones to Jesus in the ways we have mentioned they will receive many blessings.

Jesus in our text has a word to say to adults also. **He wants adults to be like little children in their faith.**

2.

Jesus assures us, ***“I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*** Those who are not acquainted with these words may scoff and ask why they should become like a little child? The Lord is not saying that adults should be like little children in all respects. He surely does not want them to be simple-minded or silly. In many ways the Lord expects mature thinking on our part. But when it comes to our faith, how we believe and how we trust in the Lord, he wants us to be like little children. Peter writes, ***“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good,”*** 1 Peter 2:2. When the disciples asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus ***“called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,’*** Matthew 18:2-3. How is it that little children can be a model for adults? In their childlike trust and faith little children believe what they are told. They do not yet have all the questions adults think of. Adults may say, “You can’t tell me anything. I’ve lived a long time, and I know what I believe!” But the Lord does not want us to have a proud, haughty attitude toward him and his Word. He wants us to have a humble, childlike attitude.

We know that many adults today are scoffers and critics of God’s Word. They read the Bible and then want to stand in judgment over the Lord’s Word. For example, they read about the creation of the universe and say that it’s silly to believe that God made everything in six twenty-four hour days. But then they are willing to accept the silly theories of evolution. They may say that it is foolish to believe that Jonah was actually swallowed by a great fish, or that a great flood destroyed the earth and that everyone except Noah and his family were drowned. In our day they also decide that it is foolish to believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus on the third day after his death. Let us not make the mistake of joining with these critics who think they are so learned and intelligent, but despise God’s Word.

May our attitude be that of the psalmist who writes, ***“My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me,”*** Psalm 131:1-2. May we put our trust in the Lord who is infinitely greater and wiser than we are. May he help us to be childlike in our faith, and may he help us to do for our children what is pleasing to him. Amen.

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