

# CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SUNDAY

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### Jesus Loves the Little Children

#### Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup>And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Today is a historic day here at Cross of Glory. We will be installing Sylvia Beahm as the toddler teacher for the tenth year of our Cross of Glory Learning Center. It's a day that I'm sure Sylvia won't forget. It's a day that none of us should forget. God has blessed us by sending another worker to bring his Word to little children and we should not take that blessing lightly. As Sylvia begins her public ministry here at Cross of Glory, I'd like to remind her of a very basic truth from God's Word. It's one that we should all keep in mind and be reminded of often. It's the truth that is found in the title of a favorite children's song: Jesus Loves the Little Children.

Our reading picks up as Jesus is in the midst of having a very grown up conversation. He is speaking with the Pharisees on the subject of divorce. A large crowd of people is gathered to hear what Jesus has to say. The conversations that Jesus has been having with members of the crowd have been very important ones. He has been discussing the important topic of the kingdom of God with the people. This is a topic that takes much thought and can be very difficult to understand. It was especially difficult for those who did not believe in Jesus as the Son of God and were completely baffled by the parables he kept speaking. It is in the midst of this deep, grown up discussion that people bring little children to meet Jesus. The word that Mark uses to describe these children includes infants, toddlers, and small children. We get the sense that this is not just one group of parents with a few kids. There are many parents and they keep bringing their children to Jesus.

The disciples see this as a problem and so they rebuke those who want Jesus to bless their children. To us, this seems like a very cruel act on the disciples' part. How can you turn away little kids from Jesus? But we have to realize that the disciples most likely were not stopping the children because they didn't like kids. They simply thought that there could be a better use of Jesus' time. They felt that the discussions Jesus was having with other adults were simply more important. They saw the constant stream of children being brought to Jesus as distracting him from carrying out his ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God. They had Jesus' best interest in mind. But as Jesus shows them, they were simply misguided. In fact, their actions were very upsetting to Jesus. He was moved to anger by what the disciples were doing and so he spoke words of rebuke to them: "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.*"

How could the disciples be so foolish? Why on earth would they ever want to stop children from coming to see Jesus? It can seem like a very foolish move on the disciples' part until we realize

that we, at times, are tempted to do the exact same thing. It's not that the disciples hated kids, they simply felt there were other more important needs to be concerned about. Do we ever get so caught up in our grown up world that we end up neglecting our children's most basic need of coming to see Jesus? This first and foremost applies to parents in the home. We would never intentionally try to hinder our children, but it can happen. We can find more important and more pressing needs in the household. We can get so caught up in the stress and the concern of the day to day issues—keeping a job, paying the bills, working on the house, and the list goes on. We are tempted to see taking time out for our children as just not as important as all the other pressing grown up concerns we have. And so we might skip an opportunity to share a Bible story with a child or miss out on folding our hands with them in prayer for one night.

What is true of parents also applies to us as a congregation. We also can be tempted to neglect the needs of children as we think about how we allocate our resources and carry out our ministry. We need to hear Jesus' words again and again: "Let the little children come to me." Children's ministry is not something secondary to the work of the church. It is one of the most important things that we do.

Jesus shows how important the children are when he says, "*The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*" Jesus wanted those who were present to know that children do have a part in his kingdom. He came to this earth to live and die for benefit of the whole world. This certainly includes children. Their sins need to be washed away as well. And Jesus did just this when he died on the cross. He came to bring peace and forgiveness to people of all ages. There are those that think that children can't comprehend the gospel message. It is too hard for them to understand and so we do not need to teach it to them until they get to an older age when they can truly comprehend what God has done for them. The truth is that none of us by nature can comprehend God's love for us. It takes the miracle of faith to grasp the deep spiritual truths of the Scriptures. And God can work that miracle of faith in a child just as well as he can in an adult.

In fact, Jesus holds up these little children as great examples of what it means to have faith. He says, "*I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will not enter it.*" Being a member of God's kingdom and possessing eternal life takes simple trust in Jesus as your Savior from sin. Who displays this simple trust in Jesus better than a little child? I think most parents can agree that there are times they only wish they could possess the same level of trust in Jesus as they see in their children. There are many times a pastor or teacher with all the book knowledge of the Scriptures that they possess can be put to shame by a small child simply singing: "*Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.*"

However, there is no way that children can possess this kind of faith if they first do not come into contact with their Savior Jesus. When those parents brought their children to Jesus in our reading, what did he do for them? *He took them into his arms and he blessed them.* This was not just some kind gesture of Jesus. Jesus imparted upon them a real blessing. This is the same thing we want for our own children and the children of our church family, isn't it? That is why we want to bring our children to Jesus. We do this first when we bring them to the font to meet their Savior and be adopted into God's family. But it doesn't end there. Bringing children to Jesus is something we do again and again as we read Bible stories to them, discipline them using God's Word, bring them to church... This isn't just a small part of what we do for our children. It is the most important thing we can do for them.

The Learning Center that we operate as a congregation provides another opportunity for parents to let their little children come to Jesus. The children who come are certainly blessed through this ministry. They hear about the Savior every day of the week. They have the opportunity to worship their Savior and sing his praise. They learn the importance of a faith life and prayer. They begin to develop spiritual habits that we pray will last a whole life through.

Today, as you are being installed as a part of this ministry, Sylvia, it's good for you to see how important this work is. IT will be good for you to remember that each day of the school year as well. There will certainly be times when you will be tempted to think otherwise. There will be challenges and frustrations along the way. But, through it all, never forget: Jesus loves the little children. You have the privilege of taking little children in your arms and leading them into the arms of their Savior. This is certainly a high calling and you have the prayers of everyone in this congregation that the Lord will give you the patience, love and faith to carry out this calling to his glory. May we all see the great privilege it is for each of us to take part in the work of bringing children to Jesus and take time out of our grown up world to share the love of Christ with a child. As we sang in our psalm today: "*We will not hide them from our children. We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.*" **Amen.**

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