Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

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Childlike Faith, Luke 18:15-17, Mark 10:16

When I was young, I remember hearing "children are to be seen and not heard." That is the opinion of some people and some churches. Well, at First United Methodist Church Andalusia, we honor and value our children as a vital and important part of our family of faith. So, in the Spirit of Christ, who welcomed little children to come to him, we seek to model that spirit of welcome and support for our children. On the first Sunday, when we generally observe Holy Communion, we don't excuse the children, but rather we welcome the children to bring their parents to the altar and share together the bread and the cup in remembrance of Christ. I've heard that this simple act of including the children in worship to partake of the Lord's Supper has generated a lot of communication between the children and their parents. As United Methodists, we practice open communion; all are welcome to come and feast on the Presence of Christ. This is one way we have found to honor and not overlook our children at church.

What are some ways that your church is honoring children? What are some new ways your church could welcome children?

Commentary Lesson

We are not told why the children were brought to Jesus. It has been estimated that mortality rates ran as high as 30 percent; the terrors of disease, famine and war claimed 30 percent of those who survived to the age of six and sixty percent by the age of sixteen. No doubt parents were bringing their children to Jesus for him to bless them; hearing that his touch had healed others (Luke 6:19). The miraculous healing rabbi these parents had heard so much about could surely touch their infants and bless them. It was common during this time for a mother to bring her one year old baby on his/her birthday to be blessed by a prominent and respected rabbi. It might appear at first that the disciples' words are harsh and unwelcoming. But we must be ever mindful of where Jesus was going. He was on the way to Jerusalem to die on the cross. The disciples knew the grief and anguish that was tremendously heavy upon the Master. Perhaps, we've heard a mother say to her young child at home, "Don't bother your daddy; he's tired and worried tonight." That is exactly how the disciple felt about Jesus.

William Barclay points that one of the loveliest things in all the gospels is that Jesus had time for the children even when he was on his way to die in Jerusalem. Jesus' attention turns directly to the children. He did not say, "Let them bring the little children to me," but "Let the little children come to me." By his words, he gives expression to the gentle, nurturing side of God, which the Psalmist sang of Psalm 131:2. Jesus' rebuke, Do not hinder them," recalls the disciples misguided censorship of the unauthorized exorcist (Luke
9:49-50) and the lawyers' failed stewardship of the key of knowledge (Luke 11:52). Whenever people in positions of power hinder others - the outcasts, women, the poor, or children - from entering the Kingdom of Heaven, it is always a mistake. In the book of Acts, "hinder" will become a clue to the theme of the gospel's defeat of all who would erect barriers to its being preached to Samaritans (Acts 8:4-8), a eunuch (Acts 8:36) or the Gentiles (Acts 10:47; 11:17; 28:31).

Jesus surprisingly states that it was for the childlike that heaven was composed. Children who were so often overlooked and not given any rights or status during Jesus' day, Jesus honors. He provides a challenge for those who no longer live in the world of children - only those who possess a childlike faith will gain access to heaven. What do you think it means to have a childlike faith? A childlike faith means - to keep alive a sense of wonder, to live in and be fully committed to Jesus, instinctively to obey, to forgive and to forget - that is the childlike faith, and that is the passport to the Kingdom of heaven.

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