

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. 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. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

“You Have Got To Be Kidding”

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October 2, 2011

Children's Sabbath, bringing together ideas of a Danish theologian Kierkegaard. As a church we struggle, like a lot of churches do, related to children and worship. Kierkegaard believed we had to understand the dark night of the soul, the importance of the leap of faith as I have said earlier. What do we do with children in worship? We've tried to do something, the first Sunday of every month, family worship, no Sunday School, children in church, worship, Communion for the whole family, a worship hour that somehow speaks to children and adults. We think it's important for children to experience worship. We have learned the need to do a better job as we do it, and we will work on that, making sure our worship services mean something for the children, while at the same time giving adults an experience that they can appreciate. It's important.

Mary Pipher in her book *In the Shelter of Each Other*, tells us how important. She says, "A culture in which children fear adults, and adults are uneasy around children, is an unhealthy and dangerous place." What happens when children are not encouraged, in a culture that is unhealthy? What happens? What happens?

Let me tell you about a little boy. They said his father had a good job and was respectable, but in the home he wasn't. He had a short temper. He was an alcoholic, and he was mean. Two wives had left him, and the little boy's mother was half his father's age. She was pregnant when they were married, and his younger brother was in prison for theft, and another brother died when the little boy was 11, and his father didn't even go to the funeral and wouldn't let his wife go to the funeral. He was angry with the village priest. The 11-year-old was the only one who went to his brother's funeral. It made a profound impact on him. His father beat him and his mother would hide when that was going on, because she was afraid, and his father used to call him with a whistle, the same whistle he'd use to call a dog. Remember that story, and the little boy, and the home in which he grew up.

And remember how the disciples spoke harshly to Jesus, as he said, "Let the children come to me, forbid them not, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." And remember the disciples speaking harshly, saying, "Send the children away," and Jesus saying, "Let the children come." And remember Paul the Apostle, and how he said, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I acted like a child. But when I became adult, I put away childish things." And so this morning, Children's Sabbath, you're going

to see children on the screen, pictures of our children. They're not just any children, they're our children. I want you to look at them, but I want you to listen to me. Look at them, listen to me. Who will win? The preacher or the pictures? Let the children come, or put away childish things. And the little boy whose father beat him.

We all know children are silly. How can we take them seriously. There's so silly, I mean, look at the way they are. They think the tree they're climbing is a ship that's in the middle of the ocean. They imagine a dog to be a prize thoroughbred horse. Children are silly. They get a baseball and a bat, and they swing the bat at the baseball, they imagine that they're in the bottom of the ninth in the world series, and they have a walk off home run to win the game. You just look at them. They do these things. Did you ever see what they do with a stick of celery and peanut butter and raisins? It's called "ants on a log," I imagine.

The little girl was pounding away at her mother's computer. When her mother asked what she was doing, she said, "I'm writing a story" and her mother said "What does it say?" and she said, "I don't know, I can't read." See, that's silly. Children into their parents' shoes and shirts and the parents are having this real important discussion about the nature of nature, or the first cause of creation, and children are so silly, they come up with these parents shirts and their shoes and they come in and they're acting out some kind of play, and all the conversation stops and the parents watch them. Something about they're doing with their play, something about Bob the Builder and Thomas the Train getting together on the tracks, leading into town, and they saved the day. Or maybe it's the re-enactment of last January's Rose Parade. You ought to see what they do with a cat. They say silly things like "I'm a cookie monster, I'm a superhero" and they put on bath towels around their necks and jump off picnic tables, and they actually think they can fly.

Ever listen to a child who was sitting in the back seat of a car on a long trip? They start singing these silly songs about little puppies and fish that swim in a lake and the moon and the spoon ran away in the lake of Maritainia. They're so silly, and why do we pay attention to children? And look at what happens when you leave one of their stuffed animals at a motel, and you get in the car and it's an hour later, and the child realizes Jumper the stuffed rabbit isn't in the car. I mean, what it is, is a five dollar garage sale gift with a missing eye and hair pulled out, and a tail that was once white, but is now the color of vomit, and for good reason. Why, you'd think that Jumper was textile art designed by Picasso, and this inanimate rag would have the capacity to speak, because you turn your car around and you go back an hour to pick the thing up, for cryin' out loud.

And they want to talk about the leap of faith. They think imagination is more important than knowing. They believe the story is more accurate than fact, that dreams come true, and they will tell you laughter is a cure for tears, and good will prevail, and truth will win over falsehood, and no matter how it looks, you can't see how it is, because you can't see how it is until you take a leap of faith. We adults put away childish things. We've got better things to do. We've got to understand the stimulus bill and jobs act and how it is you make money by printing more of it. We've got to take a look at the world that's so

serious, and these major issues, like who should be the Broncos' starting quarterback? And we're concerned with what do you do with a souffle that falls before you serve it, or should a pumpkin have a smile or a frown on it, or when do you put it outside on the stoop? Because if you put it out too early, the neighborhood kids gonna take it and launch it into the street like an exploding missile. We think about important things, like how did Moses get the people across the Red Sea? Or which commandment is the worst one when you break it? Or what is the unpardonable sin, and have we committed it? And how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? And if a tree falls in the forest and nobody's around, does it make a sound? Or can God build a rock that God cannot lift? Or is God all-powerful? Or why do bad things happen? Is it bad to kill? Is it bad to kill somebody who's bad? And when we pray for rain and it rains, did we do that or did God do that? See, adults think about these things, and we pray for a victory, and then we lose. Or we pray for a parking spot in Old Town, and some Presbyterian beats us to it. Were her prayers better than ours? Should we change churches?

Because we've got reality. We know sometimes the princess who kissed the frog that turned into the prince wants the frog back. We understand that, you see. And sometimes the best that could happen to us is to have the heat in our heart melt the lead in our feet so we can get on and do something instead of talking about it. Sometimes you do all that you can do on the task that cannot be done, and sometime nice guys don't finish last, they don't even finish, and second place? We know it's just another name for the first loser. We adults put away childish things. We knot the dark night of the soul, we know reality, we know, as George Will said, football amuses us because it makes a game out of the two most destructive things in human society, which is violence and committee meetings. We know eagles may soar but weasels don't get sucked into get engines. I don't know what that means, but we know that. That artificial intelligence is no match for natural stupidity, that indecision is the key to flexibility. We understand how it is in life, and how life can get to us and through us. The dark night of our soul, we adults understand that. We face it, we speak of it, and we refuse to turn it into something silly. Things don't add up, it's reality, it's the dark night of the soul. But remember the boy whose father beat him.

The second thing I want to say, of you're still with me, which I doubt. Anyway, if you're still with me, there comes a time, you know, when we were a child, and we put away childish things, and not only are children silly, but they are suggestible. They believe anything you tell them. Tell them about an Easter Bunny, and they go get a basket and start looking for colored Easter eggs. Tell them about Santa Claus, and they can hear footsteps on the roof on the 24th of December, and they can see reindeer ride off into the distance, and they can hear somebody say "Ho Ho Ho" in the night. They're gullible and naïve. Tell them water runs uphill, they believe you. Tell them that love is stronger than war, they'll start believing in peace. Convince them that it's wrong to tell a lie, and they will never tell one, even when it might be better for them if they did.

You tell a group of children that the Sunday School pictures we have at the church are really not pictures of Jesus, because really, people don't really know what he looked like, and one of them will stop you with a firm sense of confidence and say, "Well, it looks like him to me." You try to explain that Noah's Ark is just a story, and there never was a

flood, and one of those 4th grade students will overlook your diplomas and override your seminary education telling you, "You're wrong, Mister. Mrs. Walton my Sunday School teacher, she said it really happened, so it did." Children are suggestible. Tell them that they are special, they think they really are. Tell them God loves them, they believe they're surrounded by love. Tell them that they are God's children, and they see God as the loving parent. Even Abba, Father, who are in heaven. There was one boy who thought he could build a rocket that could go into outer space, and on an October day, into an October sky, he tried it. People laughed at him. And there was a little girl who wanted to be a gymnast, and everybody told her she couldn't do it until Bela Caroli told her that she could, and Mary Lou Retton believe him. There were two brothers who believed that human beings could actually fly, Orville and Wilbur. And they were the laughingstock in Dayton, Ohio.

You tell a child something and they'll believe it. They're moldable, so ready to believe the best in the world. All you have to do is to take the leap of faith, they will say, and you will land where you should, and you will see what you're looking for, and you will hear the good news that the bad news is yesterday's news. Things make sense to them. They think people who are followers of the Lord were the 12 decibels, for example. They think the Apostles had wives called the Epistles, and they think Paul cavorted into Christianity and preached holy acrimony, which is another name for marriage. They think these things. And they think you should live by the Golden Rule, which says to do one to others before they do one to you. Leap of faith. They are suggestible.

We adults have put away childish things, because we know doubt. We know the dark night of the soul. It used to be we thought life would have turned out differently if we only knew what we know now. Now we come to the point, we're not sure what we know now. It used to be that we thought we knew the secret of success, but we've come to realize that it's still a secret. Even when you win, you lose. You tell me that I won a million dollars, and all I have to do is to send my social security number and my bank account number and money will be deposited in a bank in Switzerland. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call the Attorney General and report a fraud. And when we go out of town we lock our doors to our homes. We may never have been robbed, but there could always be that first time, and with our bad luck it could probably happen. It could probably happen to us. We know you can't make a comeback if you've never been somewhere, and we know that beauty is only a light switch away from only, and we know the dark night of the soul, because we have seen it in the wee hours of the night when the air was stagnant and there was no breeze and the sounds we heard were a threat, and we know the world has a claw and a tooth and an arm and a hammer and run for your life but keep your hand on your wallet.

We put away childish things. We are adults here. Children are silly and suggestible. We adults know reality and doubt. Children know fantasy and faith. Adults, we adults, we're like the man who was president of a small real estate company who put a sign on his desk that said, "I am the boss" and his wife called from home to tell him she wanted her sign back. We are like Jay Kessler, who said one of the greatest hopes in life is to wind up with at least eight people who will attend your funeral without checking their watches

once. Someone pondered, "Before children, I was thankful of the opportunity to obtain a college education. After children, I am thankful to be able to finish a complete thought without being interrupted. Before children, I was thankful for fresh organic vegetables. After children, I was thankful for microwaveable macaroni and cheese. Before children, I was thankful for holistic medicine and natural herbs. After children, I'm thankful for pediatric cough syrup that is guaranteed to cause drowsiness in youngsters." As adults we know it. We were born naked, wet, and hungry, and then it gets worse. Because we know the dark night of the soul. As adults we get exercise just by pushing our luck, and Jesus said to us adults, "Sit down. This bread is my body, it's broken for you. This cup is the new covenant of my blood. Body and soul I give. Let the children come to me. Let them come to you, through me." Here's the thing. This is why children in church. This is why Jesus said let the children come. This is why he wanted them near to him, and to us. See, if children do not have adults to remind them of reality and doubt, children will become lost in a world they can never understand because life isn't all fantasy. But on the other hand, adults, if we don't have children to answer the dark night of the soul with hope, we will sink into despair. For you see, life requires faith and a leap of faith from time to time, and a culture in which children fear adults and adults are uneasy around children is an unhealthy and dangerous place.

This morning, I hope you have been able to watch the children's pictures, and I hope you could hear what I've tried to say because it is important. How important. Remember the little boy, the one they said his father beat him, his mother hid because she was afraid. One brother went to prison, another brother died. Nobody went to the funeral except the little boy, and his father used a whistle to call him, the same whistle he used to call the dog. That little boy lived in a world where he feared adults and adults were uneasy around him. He grew up. You know who he is. His name was Adolf Hitler. Listen to me. His name was Adolf Hitler. That's what happens when we abuse and ignore our kids.