

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.

Let the Little Children Come
Rev. Ray Miller
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Jesus spoke about children on several occasions. Michael Quoist, a Roman Catholic priest, in his book *Prayers*, also speaks about children. Perhaps you've already read this at the beginning of the order of worship for today, but now I would like to read it again. "God says, 'I like youngsters. I want people to be like them. I don't like old people unless they are still children. I want only children in my kingdom. This has been decreed from the beginning of time. Youngsters, twisted, humped, wrinkled, white-bearded, all kinds of youngsters, but youngsters. There is no changing it. It has been decided. There is room for no-one else'."

Jesus said, unless you become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. And another time he said, unless you are born anew, you cannot be in the kingdom of heaven. It's a strange journey we make through life, isn't it? We begin as a baby. We come into the world as a baby who loves being held in the arms of mother or dad, nestled there. We feel the warmth of their bodies, we feel their love. When we cry out, they give us something to eat, or when we cry out they clean us up. And even though we make messes, they love us anyway.

But it isn't too long before we start hearing the words, "Grow up. It's time for you to grow up." And so we grow up, and we think it means becoming independent, becoming a person who doesn't need anybody else. We will become our own person. And so we grow up. And then Jesus says, "Unless you become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven." From a baby, "Grow up," to an adult, "Become a child." Strange journey. What in the world is all this about?

Last Sunday, our house was invaded by five people. Sondra's son, her daughter-in-law, and three young grandsons, ages seven, six, and two and a half. Now, Michael, the oldest and Charlie, the youngest, and I all got up early in the morning. And so on their first morning here, we got up, and they were sleeping on the lower level, and I was in my office and they woke up and I went out and I said, "Come on over here, we'll light this tree." And I plugged the lights in a tree downstairs that I decorated with snowman lights, and all birds. Little Charlie stood there, his eyes wide, and said, "Snowman." Yes, snowman. And then he said "Bird." Bird, bird bird. He went through 35 birds. But his eyes were all aglow.

They'd been told that they could see the mountains if they looked out the window of our house, and yeah, they were there. And then they were looking out and they said, "Grandpa, what are those two boxes out there?" So I went over and looked out the window. One apparently housed some kind of electrical stuff, on the golf course. I said, "Well the other one is a toilet." "Oh." And then they saw a rabbit running across, and they said, "Rabbit, there's a rabbit!" Now they were excited. We have tons of rabbits out there. When Sondra and I look at rabbits, we see those creatures that are going to eat up everything out in our landscaping. They saw a wonderful creature of God. Unless you become like a child, with your eyes wide open to the mercies of God, Paul says, you cannot have the kingdom of heaven.

There was a guy playing a violin at a metro station in Washington, DC. He was playing there – you know, you've encountered such people out at DIA, or maybe on the streets of Denver, or in Fort Collins, and he had started playing, and it was about three minutes before anyone acted like they were even aware that he was playing a violin. And it was a little while later before a woman dropped a dollar bill in his receptacle without even looking at him. There were a lot of people that walked by, of course. One man stopped and leaned against the wall for a moment or two, looked at his watch and then hurried on. Then came a woman with her little girl, and as they were walking past this violinist, the little girl kept looking at the violinist, and the mother kept saying, "Come on," and she was looking at the violinist and listening to the music. Finally she dragged her daughter along. There were a few other children, same thing. Children were listening to the music and looking at this man playing a violin while the parents were anxious to get on. After 45 minutes he stopped playing. Twenty people had dropped something in his container, \$32, and when he finished playing, nobody applauded, nobody noticed, there was just silence, and he packed up and left. This man was Joshua Bell, a renowned violinist, who had been playing one of the most intricate of Bach pieces, who two nights before had played in a hall in Boston that was sold out, where the average price of a ticket was \$100.

With eyes wide open.... unless you become like a child.... unless you're able to see the things and hear the sounds that are so often drowned out by the busyness and the cacophony of sound and noise that permeates our world, unless you see and hear, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, because these are the places where, as Marcus Borg says, these are the thin places in our lives, where the eternal meets the temporal, where the divine touches the human. Unless you become like a child, unless you are someone who sees and hears the glories of God, and of yourself, you'll miss the kingdom. First thing, second. To become a child is to know who you are. Who are you? I guess if you were asked that as a child, you might say, "I am Cindy's son. I am Frankie's daughter."

I was Johnny's son, and once in a while I was Katherine's son. But mostly I was Johnny's son, my dad. Our son Randy – who are you? "I'm Pastor Ray's son." Later on it became, "Who is he? He's my father." You know, there is a reversal that takes place there as kids get older. God says, "You are my child, that's who you are." And just as we who have a mother and father, but we have more than that. We have a long heritage that goes back beyond where any of us can ever see. I mean, I am not only Johnny's son and Katherine's son, I am also a son of the whole Miller clan, the Coleman clan, the Sheets,

clan, the Leopold clan, or whatever. I am part of that whole stream of history, and as God's child, you and I are a son of God or a daughter of God, who are part of that long stream of the people of faith who have known that we have a diving parent, and that we are brothers and sisters together.

There was a boy who, according to the story, he went to church. He went alone. He'd slip into the service after it started, and he would slip out before it ended, because he was a boy who had no father, did not know who his father was, and he had noticed that sometimes when the pastor shook hands with kids, the pastor would say, "Well, whose son are you?" or "Whose daughter are you?" And he didn't want the pastor to ask him that question, because he didn't have an answer. But there was one Sunday when he got trapped, he didn't get out soon enough, and so he had to shake the pastor's hand, and when the pastor shook his hand, sure enough, the pastor said, "Now, whose son are you?" and before the boy had a chance to answer, the pastor said, "I know whose son you are. You are a son of God." And that is who he was, and that is who you are. A daughter of God, a son of God. To live as a child of God is to know who we are and who we are related to. It also involves a matter of trust. Children trust when they're little, don't they?

I remember when our children were at the point where they were going to learn how to walk. Now, my son needed to learn how to walk. He weighed 35 pounds when he was one year old, and believe me, carrying my son around was like lifting weights, and I wanted him to learn how to walk, but he was not an early walker. He was past one year old when he learned to walk, but finally he was pulling himself up, and I'd put him on his feet, and then I'd back up and say, "Come on, Randy, come on, walk to Daddy." And he'd look at me like, "Are you crazy?" He'd look at me again, look into my face and my eyes, then he'd move one of those chubby legs and down he'd go. I'd pick him up and set him up again and say, "Come on, Daddy's here, walk to Daddy". After a while, he moved both chubby legs and actually walked. Praise the Lord!

He trusted that I was not going to let him get hurt, and that I would be there to pick him up when he fell. And when he was learning to – when we went to some place where there was a swimming pool and.. you know, in those days, this was the old days, kids didn't wear flotation devices. At least, our kids didn't. So I'd get in the pool, and Randy'd be standing along the side, and I'd say, "Come on Randy, jump, Daddy will catch you. It'll be okay. Come on." He wasn't too sure about that. He'd look at me, and finally, after looking into my eyes, I guess he was thinking, "I guess I can try it." He jumped in my arms and the water would support him. Over and over again we'd do that, and he learned that he could trust.

Trust is a very important part of being a child of God. We look at 2009. Wednesday night, if you're up late, you might at the strike of midnight be saying to somebody, "Happy New Year." Well, we hope so. But right now, we don't know, do we. We look at the turmoil of the economy and we don't know. We are in what I guess they say is a deep recession. We don't know whether we are as far into that as we are going to go. We don't know. We don't know, it seems, how to extricate ourselves from a war that we have been involved in. We don't seem to know how to deal with terrorists. We don't know what

personal issues we'll deal with, what deaths we might encounter, what physical illnesses we might have, what family problems we might encounter. 2009, we don't know. But we can trust that 2009 will be all right if we look into the eyes of God, into the eyes of Jesus. And if we can know that whatever come, that we will not be allowed to sink, that we won't be allowed to fall without someone to pick us up.

Unless you become like a child, you're going to miss it, Jesus says. Unless you have your eyes and your ears and your hearts open to the miracles. They're everywhere. Unless you know who you are and to whom you belong. Unless you're willing to trust the eternal spirit, you can't enter the kingdom of Heaven. Michael Quoist in that prayer says, "I like youngsters because they keep their eyes on me, they trust me." Jesus says, "Unless you become like a child, you cannot be part of the kingdom of Heaven." Amen.

We're going to do something this morning which is called the blessing of the children. Now at this time, by the way, if any of you have children in the nursery and would like to go and get them, this is a good time to do that. But we will ask any parents who wish to bring their children for a blessing to do so. We're not going to escort you up. You come on your own if you wish to come, and these can be children of any age. If you bring your children up, we'd like you to say to whoever you go to, and there will be four of us, give the first name of the child, one at a time, and a blessing will be given to that child. Pastors Chuck and Pam will be here at the center aisle, Martha will be there and I will be here, and you just come to any one of us. So, we invite you to come with your children if you wish, for your children to receive a blessing.