

**+ Mark 10:13-16 + Come, Little Child! + 19th Sunday after Pentecost + 11 October 2009 +**

Around the time I was born, I received a picture from the Lutheran Girl Pioneers at the church in Minnesota where my father was vicaring. Some of my first memories are of that picture. It was a picture of Jesus and the little children. When my parents would put me to bed, we would look at the picture and I would point out who was who. Of course, there was Jesus. The little boy in the back was my brother. The little dark-haired boy was my cousin and I was the little boy held in Jesus' hands. I was always that little boy and Jesus was always holding me in his loving hands. I didn't have to be afraid if I had a bad dream, because I knew Jesus was holding me in his hands.

As I grew up and my family moved around, the picture was packed in a box and nearly forgotten. Life went on. I grew up and found out how easy it is to forget that Jesus is always holding me in his hands. I found out how easy it is to let the worries and difficulties of this life crowd out that simple trust I used to have. I found out how much easier it seems to depend on my own intelligence or common sense than to trust God's wisdom.

Shortly after Lisa and I were married, though, I found the picture again. I remembered who was who and who was holding me in His loving hands. The account of Jesus and the little children still matters for you and me today, whether young or old, as he tells each of us, **COME, LITTLE CHILD!**

Jesus was near the end of his earthly life. He was teaching his disciples about the kingdom of God and what it means to be God's "little ones." When these grown men had argued over who was the "greatest" in Christ's kingdom, Jesus brought a little child into their midst and silenced them. There was no doubt how serious he was and is about these little ones.

Moms and dads were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed. Luke tells us they were even bringing infants. By faith, they knew his mere touch would bring blessing to their children. The disciples, however, didn't think so. "Sorry, the Master's too busy. He doesn't have time for little kids. Go away!" You can imagine the heartbroken looks on the parents' faces, but when Jesus saw what his disciples were doing, he became very angry. In fact, the word Mark uses here is said about Jesus only one other time in this Gospel. Jesus very strongly set them straight. ***"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*** With that, the little boys and girls were brought to his waiting arms and he blessed them. Jesus' words strike home. When your dad is 6'5" and 300 lbs., you know where the safest place is. If I had a nightmare or someone was mean to me, I knew where to run. I could climb up onto Dad's lap and I knew I was safe. No one could hurt me. No monster could get me if my Dad held me in his arms. Jesus speaks of that same childlike trust here. He speaks about the simple faith of a child that trusts even when the child isn't sure. That simple faith trusts that the safest place to be is secure in the arms of Jesus.

At first, Jesus' words sound easy. Then a life's worth of distractions get in the way. Satan tries to make you think that Jesus' arms are not the safest place to be. Maybe Satan uses your job to make you so busy that you spend your life trying to reach a goal that really doesn't mean anything in the end. Maybe he twists your thinking so you depend on yourself to control your life, rather than trust the One who provides for all your needs. Maybe Satan uses an illness or financial trouble or difficulties in your marriage to make you worry because God doesn't seem to care enough to take care of your problems. So easily we lack a childlike trust in Christ!

Jesus' words in our text cut us to the heart because we know how quickly we've let the distractions get in the way. We know how much easier it seems to depend solely on ourselves than to trust in God's wisdom to guide our lives. We know how easy it is to let the busyness or difficulties of our lives make us forget that our Savior is always holding us in his loving arms.

Then Jesus comes along and reminds each of us, **"Come, little child.** See what I have done for you. You can trust me without hesitation because I came down from heaven and became a human being just like you. I went through the same difficulties and temptations. I willingly let my blood be shed for you. I rescued you from those who attack you every day. I even defeated death for you when I rose from the dead. I have made you one of my children through that simple faith created by my Holy Spirit through my Word. One day you will join me for eternity in my heavenly home. Come, my little child, I will take care of you! Come, enjoy my blessings!"

Jesus has done so much for you. He has made you his own, and now you get to enjoy all his many blessings. Sometime take a look at a little child in their mother or father's arms. When that little one is there, they have everything they need. They have food to eat, safety, protection, assurance, calmness, comfort and love. They have everything they need.

In the same way, look at all of the blessings of being in Jesus' arms. He tells you, "Come, enjoy the forgiveness of all your sins. I've wiped them away. Enjoy my promises of salvation and eternal life. You will join me in heaven one day. Enjoy the encouragement I have for you as I speak to you through my Word. Enjoy the precious gifts of my

body and blood in my Holy Supper and the wonderful promises that come through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism. Enjoy this fellowship you have with your brothers and sisters, who are also my children both on earth and in heaven. Enjoy the gift of prayer. You can come to me at any time and for any reason and I will answer your prayer for your good. You get everything you need in me.”

Why do you and I get to enjoy these blessings? God’s grace that provides these blessings is also what got us here. Like those little children brought by their parents, we, too, were brought to Jesus. Perhaps as a little child, your parents brought you to receive the blessings of Holy Baptism. Through water and the Word, Jesus scooped you up in his arms and made you his own. Then your parents brought you back to God’s Word by bringing you to church regularly and by telling you about Jesus. Now maybe it wasn’t until you were older or an adult before you came to faith in Jesus as your Savior. In that case, you were brought also—maybe by a neighbor or a loved one. Still you received the same blessings. Whether young or old, you didn’t come to Christ on your own, but were brought to Jesus through his Word and Sacraments. Through them, Jesus made you his own child. Jesus makes you part of his kingdom and gives you the gift of a childlike faith in him.

Since we get to enjoy all these blessings because we’ve been brought to Jesus’ loving arms, won’t we want to bring our children to him too? Jesus said, **“Let the little children come to me.” Come with your child.** That’s what the moms and dads were doing when they brought their little boys and girls to Jesus. They wanted him to bless their children, because they knew he was the Son of God and their Savior. He had demonstrated before how precious these children were to him. Even now he encourages parents to bring their children to him, and reminds us, **“Do not hinder them.”**

You might think, “I’m not like the disciples hindering the children from coming to Christ.” But have you ever been the reason they haven’t heard the Word? Someone once said that in our churches we lose many of our confirmands in the first three months after confirmation. Why? You would think immediately after confirmation would be the time when they would attend most, but most confirmands are under driving age and can’t come to church by themselves.

Maybe because of your busy schedule or some other reason, you don’t give your kids the opportunity to regularly go to Sunday School or to have family devotions or to talk to them about their Savior. Maybe you don’t take the time to show them how to act and live as children of God out of love for Christ. If our children are to enjoy the great blessings we have from Christ, then we need to bring them to Jesus. If we don’t, they and their faith will die.

Remember what Jesus said? **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”** Don’t forget that all those blessings he promises to you and me are for our children as well. Forgiveness and salvation are theirs too, as Peter declared to the crowds on Pentecost, **“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”**

You have many opportunities to bring your little ones. You can bring them to be baptized, to worship, to Sunday School. As they get older, you can bring them to confirmation class and teen class. You can have family devotions and teach them how to get into God’s Word, so they can make it their own. You can tell them what Christ has done for them. You can tell them how he holds each of them in his loving hands as he holds you. You can let your life be centered on Christ so he can be the center of their lives.

Now if you don’t have children or your children are grown and out of the house, Jesus is still talking to you too. See children as Jesus does. Yes, it might not be easy to love them when there are crayon marks on the walls and juice stains on the floor, but remember how precious these little ones are to our Savior. Consider using your time and gifts to teach the children in Sunday School, to help out with the teens or Little Treasures, to encourage and help parents of kids of every age. Maybe you can offer to spend some time with a child who doesn’t have a mom or dad or at least be friendly when kids play on your street. Maybe you can invite them to Christmas for Kids or Playgroup or their family to church. You can certainly pray for them. No matter what, Christ wants us to see children as he sees them—precious.

**Come, little child!** Jesus encourages you to come to him like little children, simply trusting in him. Come, enjoy his blessings and bring your children. His blessings are yours and fear not! He will always hold you in his arms. May you never lose that childlike trust in your Savior’s promises! Amen.