



At Home Worship for Faith and Hope

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

January 31, 2021

“People brought babies to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. When the disciples saw it, they shooed them off. Jesus called them back. “Let these children alone. Don’t get between them and me. These children are the kingdom’s pride and joy. Mark this: Unless you accept God’s kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you’ll never get in.” Luke 18:15-17 (MSG)

* Call to Worship

*Lord our God,
you yourself remind us
that all our religious practices are not worth anything
if we use them to bend you our way.*

*God, may we come to you
in humility and repentance,
ready to encounter you in love
and to turn your way.*

*Accept us as your children, sons and daughters,
together with Jesus Christ,
your Son and our Lord forever.*

Either Sing/Read the Song Below or Listen to a Worship Song

Opening Prayer

Lord, we confess, somewhere along the way, we have lost our childlike faith in You. Maybe it's because we have to have everything under our control before we will feel comfortable to pray. Maybe because we have become jaded with the darkness of the world's ways. Whatever the cause, as we set aside some time today, help us recapture some fresh inklings of childlike faith and joy in You. Amen.

NO Children's Moments This Week

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of gratitude with grit! Lift up with thanksgiving to God for the ways He has helped you through these difficult days.

Sing the Doxology Together

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayers of Our Hearts

"Prayer for Childlike Faith"

Source: Knowing-Jesus.com

Heavenly Father, help us to develop a trust and faith in You that reflects the simplicity of childlike faith that so rejoices Your heart, and which is so evident in the lives of little children, and yet which seems to evaporate into a vapor as soon as we reach the age of maturity. May we develop a wonder and an amazement at the glorious redemption story, and a deep humility as we approach Your thrice-holy, throne of grace to ask for help in time of need.

Forgive us for losing so much of the wonder of the beautiful incarnation, and for becoming complacent about the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Renew in us a deep reverence for Your holy name, as befits our great and glorious Creator God, who loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins, so that whosoever believes on Him would not perish but have everlasting life. Help us in the days that lie ahead to examine our hearts, and to see if we too have become lukewarm towards the things of God. Renew in us a childlike spirit of awe and wonder, so that once again we may marvel at the wonder of Who You truly are. And draw us ever closer into deeper intimacy with Yourself. This we ask in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

God's Word

Luke 18:15-17 (NLT)

The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!

Our Continuing Series on "Paradoxes"

Message

"Enter the Kingdom Like a Child"

Pastor Clark

...see below or go to website to listen online

* Hymn of Faith

"Jesus Loves Me"

UMH 191

Blessing

Jesus delighted in being in the presence of children longing to impart His blessing upon them...receive that blessing today as if you were a little child:

My dear child

May you be safe and secure

in the peace that only our Heavenly Father can provide.

May you find a wellspring of real joy today

that would cause your heart to thrill in my presence.

And may your hearts be filled to overflowing

with my love today.

Amen.



1. Jesus loves me! This I know,
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong;
they are weak, but he is strong.

Refrain:

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

2. Jesus loves me! This I know,
as he loved so long ago,
taking children on his knee,
saying, "Let them come to me."
(Refrain)

3. Jesus loves me still today,
walking with me on my way,
wanting as a friend to give
light and love to all who live.
(Refrain)

1. This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
his hand the wonders wrought.

2. This is my Father's world,
the birds their carols raise,
the morning light, the lily white,
declare their maker's praise.

This is my Father's world:
he shines in all that's fair;
in the rustling grass I hear him pass;
he speaks to me everywhere.

3. This is my Father's world.

O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.

This is my Father's world:
why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King; let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let the earth be glad!

Enter the Kingdom Like a Child

Luke 18:15-17 (NLT and MSG)

¹⁵ One day some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents for bothering him. ¹⁶ Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. ¹⁷ I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

Luke 18:15-17 The Message "People brought babies to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. When the disciples saw it, they shooed them off. Jesus called them back. "Let these children alone. Don't get between them and me. These children are the kingdom's pride and joy. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in."

Introduction

Did you know that down through the centuries, children were viewed as property? In fact, there was such a low regard for children, that they could be discarded at the whim of family. The practice of "exposure" was widespread. The head of the household had the legal right to say whether a baby would live or die. If a family lived in poverty and couldn't support another mouth to feed, or if the family were wealthy and didn't want the estate to be further divided or if the child was the wrong gender (usually a girl), then they would be left to die. Or especially if the baby had some disability, it was undoubtedly a victim of exposure.

Then a baby was born in Bethlehem. This baby grew up and, according to John Ortberg, began to say things about children no one else ever thought of. One day Jesus was asked the question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Matthew wrote, "He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And then Jesus said, "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

In the process, Jesus elevated the status of children and they would eventually be seen to be made in the image of their Creator. Jesus imparted worth to even little children. Today's paradox marks the way Jesus thought of little children and the way the world thinks of them and along the way, how someone finds their way into the Kingdom of heaven?

#1 Jesus and Children Belong Together

"People brought babies to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. When the disciples saw it, they shooed them off. Jesus called them back. "Let these children alone. Don't get between them and me."

Jesus announced that children were of infinite worth...that children were made in the image of the Heavenly Father...that He and children belonged together.

Jesus then made the astonishing declaration that the Kingdom of heaven belongs to those like the little children! What a paradox! In the ancient world, as shown above, kids would never have been thought to have any Kingdom worth or value.

The disciples mirror this sentiment when they try to keep the little children from bothering, interrupting, distracting Jesus' important work with the adults. Jesus responds with unexpected intensity: Let these children alone. Don't get between them and me.

Jesus is gentle and humble. Jesus is a safe person and, as a result, wherever Jesus is amounts to a safe place for children. I read about a story of a surgeon who possessed some of these remarkable qualities:

Daniel McNeely is a pediatric neurosurgeon in Halifax, Nova Scotia, so he's used to fielding questions from nervous parents and patients. But it was a first for him when an 8-year-old patient had a [specific request](#) as the child was being wheeled to surgery while clutching his stuffed animal: "My bear is ripped. Please stitch him up."

The boy, identified as Jackson McKie, has a cyst on his brain and a chronic condition called hydrocephalus. The surgery was to drain fluid and relieve pressure on his brain.

McNeely assured the boy he would, and he took the task seriously. After McNeely performed surgery on the boy's brain, he placed the bear on a table, put on blue gloves and used leftover stitches from the child's surgery to repair an underarm tear on the bear.

Then in another first, McNeely — who had never tweeted before — went on Twitter Sunday to [post a photo](#) of the moment that had been captured by a resident. He wrote, "Patient asks if I can also fix teddy bear just before being put off to sleep... how could I say no?"

"He's one of the nicest human beings I've ever met," Jackson's father, Rick McKie, said of McNeely. McKie said his son was thrilled when he woke up to see his stuffed buddy, which he takes with him everywhere he goes, had been stitched up just like him. McKie said that his family deeply appreciates McNeely's medical care over the years, as well as his human touch. "When we get there we're terrified to death, but every time we talk to Dr. McNeely we feel better."

Like that compassionate surgeon, Daniel McNeely, Jesus was tender and gentle with children, as well as the weak and fearful. In our deepest need, he puts our mind at rest with his personal attention. He mends our brokenness.

#2 Children Are the Pride and Joy of the Kingdom

"These children are the kingdom's pride and joy."

Unlike the ancient world that said that children were expendable or of little worth, in the Kingdom they are of infinite worth. The values of the Kingdom somehow resonated in the souls of children. These children are the Kingdom's pride and joy!

Safe to say that status in God's Kingdom is often inversely proportional to status in the world! Jesus overturns the cultural script regarding children and in the process elevates them as made-in-the-image-of-God creations.

How about for you? Are children a bother? Are children an interruption in your adult world? Are children a distraction from your more important agenda? Do you have time for children?

Jesus says that children need God's love and grace and yet are more receptive to God than adults whose souls have been distorted by the ways of this dark world. It is as if Jesus is telling us, come to love children. As you do, you come closer to God's Kingdom!

C. S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, seemed to grasp this.

Less than one month before he died in 1963, C. S. Lewis wrote the following letter to a young girl who wanted to know if any other Narnia books were going to be produced. It turned out to be a fond and fitting farewell to all of his devoted readers.

Dear Ruth,

Many thanks for your kind letter, and it was very good of you to write and tell me that you like my books; and what a very good letter you write for your age!

*If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope that you may always do so. I'm so thankful that you realized the "**hidden story**" in the Narnia books. **It is odd, children nearly always do, grown-ups...hardly ever.***

I'm afraid the Narnia series has come to an end, and am sorry to tell you that you can expect no more.

God bless you.

Your sincerely,

C.S. Lewis

#3 Childlike Simplicity Is the Key to Enter the Kingdom

"Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in."

Here are some aspects of childlike simplicity that I found online at Ignited2Pray:

- **TRUSTING** – Children know how to trust without hesitancy
- **TRANSPARENT** – Children are not good at hiding their flaws, they don't do image management like us adults
- **CAREFREE** – Children are free to live in the present with no concern for the future
- **INSISTENT** – As everyone knows children can be persistent
- **SPONTANEOUS** – Children are always game for a new adventure
- **IMAGINATIVE** – Children see possibilities where many may see problems
- **JOYFUL** – A child's joy is not so much based on the circumstances about them as it is in the people they love being with them

I don't know about you, but I wish I were more like those seven traits of childlike simplicity! I found a delightfully refreshing piece by Debi Zahn about childlike wonder that illustrates these beautifully:

When I look at a patch of dandelions, I see a bunch of weeds that are going to take over my yard. Kids see flowers for Mom and blowing white fluff you can wish on.

When I look at an old drunk and he smiles at me, I see a smelly, dirty person who probably wants money, and I look away. Kids see someone smiling at them, and they smile back.

When I hear music I love, I know I can't carry a tune and don't have much rhythm, so I sit self-consciously and listen. Kids feel the beat and move to it. They sing out the words, and if they don't know them, they make up their own.

When I feel wind on my face, I brace myself against it. I feel it messing up my hair and pulling me back when I walk. Kids close their eyes, spread their arms, and fly with it, until they fall to the ground laughing.

When I pray, I use big words and say "grant me this" and "give me that." Kids say "Hi, God! Thanks for my toys and my friends. Please keep the bad dreams away tonight. Sorry, I don't want to go to heaven yet. I would miss Mommy and Daddy."

When I see a mud puddle, I step around it. I see muddy shoes and clothes and dirty carpets. Kids sit in it. They see dams to build, rivers to cross, and worms to play with.

I wonder if we are given kids to teach or to learn from? No wonder God loves the little children!

God wants us to recapture that childlike simplicity and wonder because it will align us with God's Kingdom...prepare us for life in God's Kingdom. Here's another aspect of childlike simplicity:

Writer Ralph B. Smith once made an observation that **children ask roughly 125 questions per day and adults ask about six questions per day**, so somewhere between childhood and adulthood, **we lose 119 questions per day**. A child's innate curiosity about life is instilled in them at birth by the One who longs to be discovered. The more questions they ask, the more they discover about the world around them.

The more they discover about the world around them, the more they discover about the One who made them.

In the mind and heart of Jesus, however, this goes far deeper than the childlike wonder of little ones. There is something so intrinsic to children that we need to become like little children in order to find entry into God's Kingdom! **Childlike simplicity** is the **key** to gain entrance into the heavenly Kingdom!

Why is that? We gain an insight from studying the larger context of these verses. This incident is purposely sandwiched between stories of two adults who sought entrance into God's kingdom, one by religious works and the other by good deeds. Jesus is telling us that entrance into God's Kingdom won't happen via those pathways. Here the significant aspect of little childness is **dependence**. No little child expects his own effort will provide him with even food or shelter. **As a little child depends on his parents for everything, so we are to depend on God for entrance into His kingdom.**

Who are you depending on to gain entrance into God's Kingdom?

Conclusion

Sofia Cavaletti is a researcher who has pioneered the study of spirituality in young children. She finds that children often have an amazing perception that far surpasses what they've already been taught. One three-year-old girl, raised in an atheistic family with no church contact at all, no Bible in the home, asked her father, "Where did the world come from?" He answered her in strictly naturalistic, scientific terms. Then he added, "There are some people who say that all this comes from a very powerful being, and they call him God." At this, **the little girl started dancing around the room with joy as she said, "I knew what you told me wasn't true—it's him, it's him!"**

Childlike simplicity, trust, and joy wrapped up in a bundle of "kid-ness."

Imagine what your life can look like with a heightened degree of childlike simplicity? What might be different? What needs to change? How can you grow in this childlike dependence?