

Look left, look right, look around you – see the children?

Mark 9:35-37

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.'

36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.'

Mark 10:13-16

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them.

14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'

15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Kids – this is all about you!

In Despicable Me, Gru – tries to control the children with rules

We see politicians – trying to look child friendly – why?

Jesus and children – He probably did this quite often, there are several accounts in the gospels.

What is going in this story about Jesus and the children? What is Jesus trying to put right?

- A sense that we need to reduce the distraction and disruption of children so that adults can get on with doing the important stuff
- A sense of the spiritual/supernatural being an adult pre-occupation and not relevant or available to children

We do the same today.

But our thinking about children is very different:

1. In Jesus' time mortality rates amongst children was high – there was a low life expectancy. Compare that to our expectation that children live and we are distraught at an early death
2. In Jesus' time children had little value and few if any legal rights. Whereas we have (thanks to Christian influence in law and politics) embedded children's rights deep into our system and psyche

This passage still speaks to us because we do the same things Jesus was coming against:

- We try and reduce distraction and disruption so that adults can get on with doing the important stuff
- We are tempted to think that the spiritual/supernatural is not relevant for children

What does Jesus do and say?

- He promises immortality for children (eternal life in the Kingdom of God) in the face of high mortality
- Doesn't just pat them on the head but embraces them and blesses them – welcomes them into himself. The words are unusual and strong words to describe His embrace.

What do we learn from this?

To welcome and imitate children.

Leeds Vineyard places a high priority on welcoming children and learning to imitate their approach to Jesus.

Welcome

Children are not the church of tomorrow, they are the church of today. Just as much as you or me.

Our Vineyard Kids work is not a baby-sitting service whilst the adults do their spiritual thing. Jesus told the disciples off for stopping the children from approaching Him. So we don't forbid them from approaching Jesus – we expect His presence and power in the rooms where the children meet when they aren't here – just as much as in here, if not more so.

Jesus says that the Kingdom of God belongs to children (it's a possessive verb). They have it by right. Because of their attitude to Jesus.

We welcome children into the spiritual life of the church.

Imitate

Children have the right to the Kingdom of God because of their attitude. Jesus says that adults don't have that right unless we approach it like the children. That's a dramatic statement.

Yes – it's true – Jesus has strong and very real relationships with children. They hear and understand Him better than adults do. So he says "if you don't receive the Kingdom of God like a little child ... you'll miss it."

What do you think He means, "Like a child"? What do we need to imitate in order to have the possibility of receiving the Kingdom of God?

Adults - we have some sort of authority and control in this decision-making. We talk about the "power within", about "self-empowerment", about "mindfulness", even about claiming our rights.

Children don't naturally approach adults – or Jesus – like that. They know they are children and that they don't have the power or authority so they gladly/openly receive the food, clothing, shelter we give them. Our expectation (and theirs) is that they will obey our instructions (that's why disobedience is an issue!).

Jesus is challenging you and me – if you want to get close to me, if you want my presence and power, if you want have eternal life ... lay down your control, authority, your inclination to disobey and imitate the children.

Come to Him in repentance and open arms and say, "Sorry. Please forgive me. Embrace me, bless me and may I live in your power and authority".

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Welcome them & Imitate them.

David Flowers

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