

# IT'S ABOUT THE CHILDREN

October 4, 2009

Texts – Psalm 8  
Mark 10: 13 - 16

It's a simple standard Jesus sets – simple in the sense that “the important things are always simple, and the simple things are always hard.” The highest good in God's hierarchy of values, Jesus says, is the child nearest you. “*Let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Realm of God.*” [Mark 10: 14] Simple.

“*He took a child,*” Mark writes about another time,

*“and put him in the midst of them; and taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.’”* [Mark 9: 36-37]

Same message, isn't it?

It's about the children: yours and mine and theirs. Each one a precious gift. Each one utterly dependent on the love and care of others for his or her well-being. Each one unique and remarkable and special.

“The child is the father of the man,” one of our poets, William Wordsworth, said a long time ago. A lot of us who have had the privilege of being fathers have experienced that as true. I know I can date with absolute precision the moment I became what I think of now as “a fully adult male human being” – it occurred on October 27, 1971 when a nurse whose name I can no longer recall handed me a small bundle and said, “This is your son.” Being a slow learner, the lesson really did not “sink in” until that same experience had been repeated twice more!

Suddenly everything was different. The world no longer revolved around me and my

needs and my dreams. What Copernicus and Galileo did to astronomy, child birth did to a lot of us – turning the world upside down and inside out!

I won't belabor the point. It is about the children – yours, mine and theirs –, and “the important things are always simple,” but . . . but . . . “the simple things are always hard.” What happens once or twice or three times to some of us never seems to be enough to fundamentally or irrevocably get the message through to us. “*Let the children come to me,*” he said, “*do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Realm of God.*” [Mark 10: 14] But we do.

Donna and I have a “Hall of Fame” in our home. Some of you have seen it. It's on the first floor just off the kitchen, in a hallway that leads past our study to the front door. Photographs of both of our families adorn the walls. There are the required portraits of the children at various ages and stages of development (many of them from those infamous church pictorial directories). There are snapshots of each of our childhood families. And there are various “heritage” photos of our parents and grandparents and even great great grandparents. It's fun.

One photograph in particular stands out in my mind's eye this morning. It's a picture of me as a three year old little boy dressed up like a cowboy, sitting astride a Shetland Pony. Lots of those who have seen it have laughed at it; some have even suggested that the little boy who grew up to be a minister who sometimes rides a motorcycle hasn't really grown up all that much! There's some truth to that, and indeed that's my point here – Every last one of us is still somewhere deep inside three years old . . . and two years old . . . and two months old. Each one of us a precious gift. Each one of us still dependent on the love and care of others for his or her well-being. Each one of us unique and remarkable and special.

What a difference it would make if we actually treated one another that way. And what a difference it *could* make if from time to time we would stop to look at those pictures of ourselves

from childhood – the pictures we all have hanging in our homes or safely preserved in our scrapbooks – and remind ourselves of the children we once were and still are. Yes, you are and I am a precious gift. But mark it well – we remain dependent on the love and care of others for our well-being. It is not a sign of weakness to admit that, nor does it in any way diminish our value or worth as competent adult human beings.

What is true of us, of course, is equally true of every one with whom we come in contact. Oh, we go to great lengths to disguise our vulnerability and sensitivity. We “dress for success.” We accumulate symbols of power and display them proudly. We put on personas of various types and characters – sophisticated, sexy, intellectual . . . to name just a few –, but without exception every person we meet remains a little child deep inside.

*“Let the children come to me,”* Jesus said, *“do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Realm of God.”* [Mark 10: 14]

Life at its deepest level is about children: yours and mine and theirs. Each one is a precious gift. Each one utterly dependent on the love and care of others for his or her well-being. Each one unique and remarkable and special. The carpenter from Nazareth invites us to see them everywhere we go, in every person we meet. He calls us to live our lives in such a way that their well-being is enhanced, whether that is done through our vocations or avocations. As parents or grandparents, as neighbors or friends . . . in our offices or workshops, in our bedrooms and kitchens . . . and yes, here, as we gather around this table, he says – *“Let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Realm of God.”* For *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.”* Amen.