

2011 Life Sunday Sermon – Lutherans For Life – www.lutheransforlife.org

Text: Mark 10:13-16

Theme: Find Blessings in The Arms of Jesus

Pastor Jerry Moan, New Testament Professor, Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary, Plymouth, MN

As a dad, there are few moments in life more precious than the wonder of holding your newborn baby in your arms for the very first time. It's amazing! The mixture of emotions and the sense of blessing a rookie father experiences are enough to bring a grown man to tears! Tiny, fragile fingers—so perfectly formed. Even the newborn's cry tugs at the heart of his parents. This child is a special creation and blessing of the Lord.

Parents who are trusting in Jesus recognize this blessing. They want the best for their children. They desire to provide for their physical and emotional needs as best they can. But especially, they care about the spiritual life of their little ones. Their longing is to bring their children to Jesus for His blessing. It's a picture we find in each of the Gospels. In Mark 10:13–16 we read:

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

I want you to pay special attention to the actions and reactions that stand out in this passage. They raise some vital questions for us to ponder: What about these parents? Why did they do what they did? And how about the disciples? What was their reaction? And what lay behind it? Most importantly, how does Jesus respond? What did He do? And what does He want to teach us? *How can a babe show us the way into the Kingdom of God?*

Let's start with the parents: What can we learn from them? In verses 13 and 14 we discover that they present a much needed model for parents today. The example we see here is that believing parents bring their children to be blessed in the arms of Jesus (verses 13-14). We bring our children to Jesus as a simple act of faith. Think about it. If we did not believe that bringing our children to Jesus was of any benefit to them, why would we do it? Many in our day fail to acknowledge that Jesus is the Creator, the

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Giver of Life. They have never known for themselves the blessing of being held in the saving arms of Jesus. They see no point in bringing their little ones to the Lord. They're blinded to the reality of sin in our world and the consequences that our sinfulness has brought into our lives. But not these parents. They took the initiative. They made the effort. They understood that parents need to take an active role in the spiritual training of their children. They brought their children to Jesus for a reason. *What was that reason?*

We bring our children to Jesus in recognition of their great need. Yes, even babies have a spiritual need. The Bible is very clear on this point, that all have sinned. We are born in sin. King David confessed, **“In sin my mother conceived me”** (Psalm 51:5). Our perception of things can be so skewed. We tend to think of a newborn as “perfect” and “innocent.” But the Word of God reveals otherwise. It reveals our fallen condition—the sinful nature we inherited from Adam. This is why we bring our children to Jesus—because they have a great need which only He can meet. In Christ alone we find salvation and eternal life. There is no other Name by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Recognizing this need...

We bring our children to Jesus as stewards of God's precious gifts. As parents, that is what we are—we are stewards of God's gift of life. God blesses parents with the gift of children so that we can care for them for a little while—so that we can train them in the love and fear of God. But we should not forget that, ultimately and finally, our kids belong to God. A good steward does not claim ownership, but is prepared to give back what has been entrusted to him.

Like Hannah in the Old Testament. Hannah prayed for a son, and promised him to the Lord. God answered Hannah's prayer and Samuel was born. Hannah dedicated him to serve God. Believing parents do the same today. We dedicate our children to the Lord, even as we are to dedicate *everything* God has given to us. This is part of what it means to be a steward. But it's not what we do for God that will save our children. It's what God, in Christ, has done for us.

And so we can bring our little ones to Jesus in holy baptism. Why? Because children need the blessing that our Lord bestows in baptism. Although Jesus is not said to be baptizing anyone here in Mark 10, these parents are seeking His touch just the same—they were bringing their babies to Jesus for His blessing. (It's worth noting that Dr. Luke, in his parallel account, actually selects a Greek word (*brephos*) which speaks of a very small child—an infant—a word used in some contexts to refer even to a fetus—one still unborn. So it's clear that it was, in fact, babies—nursing infants—that were being brought to Jesus on this occasion.)

This is the truth God's Word would impress on us: We bring our children to Jesus seeking His promised blessing. When the Scripture says that “**they were bringing children to him that he might touch them...**” it doesn't mean that this was simply some sort of cultural ritual or family tradition they were obliged to keep. Their desire to have Jesus touch their children was for the purpose of receiving His blessing. These parents were coming to Jesus in faith, expecting that His touch was able to impart exactly what their children needed most.

There was just one small problem. Who do you suppose is standing in their way? Is it a band of Roman soldiers? No. Is it a delegation of unbelieving Pharisees? Not in this case. Sadly, it was Jesus' own disciples: “*the disciples rebuked them*” it says. These babies were *too little* to be taking up Jesus' time; *too little* to squeeze into Jesus' schedule; *too little* to bother with; *too little* to matter very much. So they thought. But not Jesus: “*Let the children come to me; do not hinder them...*” He says. We bring our children to Jesus recognizing that some will not understand. This should not surprise us. Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving world. The natural man cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God.

So it is to be expected that the world will not understand. Apart from Christ, people just don't get it. Even those who are religious (like Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night) cannot comprehend the way of Jesus—not until they are born again. This really should not surprise us at all.

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What is shocking is that Jesus' own disciples tried to prevent it! They, of all people, should have known better. Why would they react this way, rebuking the parents? No doubt, they felt protective of the Master in light of all the demands on His time and energy. Children simply were not a priority on their agenda. The disciples did not yet understand the special relation of little ones to the Kingdom of God.

From our Lord's response we come to understand what an enormous and grievous sin it is to hinder *anyone* from finding blessing in the arms of Jesus! Our Lord was clearly angry with His disciples. Their actions and attitudes were nothing less than sinful. The bottom line? *It is a sin to withhold God's intended blessing from children.* Think of what Jesus announces back in 9:42—**“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea”** (ESV). Followers of Jesus surely ought to know this. Jesus cares about little ones. They matter to Him.

Question: So, what is this blessing that Jesus intends for everyone, from the greatest to the smallest? The blessing that Jesus offers is entrance into His Kingdom (verses 14-15). Christ's Kingdom is a Kingdom of grace. It is a Kingdom in which our Lord reigns in the hearts of His people. Jesus wants us to understand that this Kingdom (which we cannot enter except by grace through faith) belongs to even the smallest and weakest among us. How is that possible? It is possible because Jesus died for all. It is possible because salvation is a gift that is offered to all. Entrance into the Kingdom can never be earned, and for certain, it is never deserved.

Our Savior's words point us one step further: Jesus wants us to understand that His Kingdom can only be received in a certain manner—as a little child. That is: in simple, childlike faith. It's not a matter of age or I.Q. It's not a matter of popularity or personality. It's not a matter of race or social status. There's only one way of salvation and it's the same for everyone. The ground is level as we kneel at the foot of the cross.

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We so easily get things turned around. But Jesus' words make it clear that it is not children who need to become like adults in order to be saved; it is the grown-ups who need to become like little children.

“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” What a humbling statement that must have been for these stunned disciples! We see, then, what is essential in order to enter God's Kingdom—a childlike faith. Think about it. What is it about little tikes that sets them apart as model candidates for God's Kingdom? What would you say? Perhaps *receptivity is the key*. How sad when a child grows up cultivating a *conscious resistance* to the truth and to Christ as the Way to eternal life!

To receive the Kingdom is essentially to enter into it. We enter this Kingdom when we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. The Bible declares that **“as many as receive Him, to them He gives the right to be called the children of God, even to those who believe on His name”** (John 1:12). What an incomparable blessing it is to be a part of God's Kingdom! We pray, “Thy Kingdom come,” longing for the blessings of Christ's lordship in our lives. Luther explains that God's Kingdom comes to us “when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word, and live a godly life here on earth and in heaven forever.”

So far, then, we have seen that *it is good and right for parents to bring their children to be blessed in the arms of Jesus* (verses 13-14); furthermore, we have discovered that *the blessing that Jesus offers is entrance into His Kingdom* (verses 14-15). There's one final truth in the final verse of our text that stands like an explanation point to all that precedes it. The wonderful truth is this: *Jesus is surely able to bless all who come to Him by faith*. Verse 16 tells us how Jesus took these little ones **“in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.”**

Why? Why did Jesus take these little ones in His arms? Why did He lay His hands on them? Was it not because they needed the blessing that He can give? Jesus went beyond what these parents expected

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Him to do. He took them in His own arms and poured out on these little ones the blessing that only He can give.

What a wonderful truth! Jesus is indeed able to impart the blessing of His saving grace to those considered the smallest and the least. More than that, He desires to do so! Never believe the devil's lie that Jesus wouldn't care enough to bother with you. Jesus continues to bless little ones...and childlike grown-ups, too! He cares about those who feel insignificant, helpless, forgotten.

What difference should this truth make in my life? *Two words: seeking and sharing.*

First of all, this truth gives me confidence to seek for myself that blessing which is found in the arms of Jesus. It calls me, in faith, to experience again the welcoming embrace of my Savior—to find security in His grip and, in His loving arms, to bask in the blessings of salvation He has provided. You can be sure of this: Jesus wants to bless you. You can always count on blessing in His arms!

Along with *seeking*, this truth calls me to share the life-changing truth about Jesus with others. What would happen if each of us prayerfully purposed to tell at least one soul each day that Jesus is the One who has made us, who cares for us, who died and rose again for us, who blesses us with both physical and spiritual blessings, and who longs to live in a personal relationship with us? The Word calls us so to go and tell.

Remember the first time you held your that precious child in your arms? Even greater than the joy of holding a newborn baby, is the joy of knowing that we are forever blessed resting in the strong arms of Jesus. Amen.