

## **Come to Me: Mark 10:13-16**

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*13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup>Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' <sup>16</sup>And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

We love our kids. We do. We have individuals who devote their time to teach kids Sunday School. We have individuals who have master's degrees in order to teach children in our schools. Some of our schedules revolve around children's activities; games, meets, performances, teacher conferences, doctors appointments. We even take the time to bless their backpacks and pray over their teachers. From the moment we find out we're expecting a child, our lives change to better theirs.

Life wasn't the same for Mark. When Mark was following Jesus, everything was about connection. Your connection to higher officials improved your social standing and worth. It's similar to the six-degrees of separation, not to be confused with the six-degrees of Kevin Bacon. The farther your separation from the emperor, the farther down the line of respect you were.

Looking back at our history, Mark takes place during a time period that was thought of as being progressive. This is a few hundred years after Alexander the Great. You remember Alexander, he had an army of diverse men. And

as they conquered territory after territory, they didn't make everyone in those towns conform to their way of life. Instead, they taught them how they they did things, and they learned how others did things. They adopted both ways of life. This varied from the way they dressed, to the way the ate or prepared food. This was thought of as a progressive time, when you could combine each culture instead of wiping them out. It was something that had never been done before. The only holdup was with the government. The Greeks knew how the government ran, it was their system, they were familiar with process. Any new outsiders that didn't catch on quickly enough to know how it ran were replaced of their government roles by Greeks who understood the process, which meant others voices weren't being heard. Those that were not Greek were quickly feeling like second class citizens. That their lives and their problems did not matter. Your respect, your worthiness, came from your connectedness, who you know at the top.

Right before this text, back in the last part of chapter 9, Jesus was talking about children and reprimanded the disciples who were debating the worthiness of others. And here they are, doing that same thing again. Who is worthy of Jesus time? He's busy. He's not to be bothered by children.

These parents, whether they believed Jesus was the Messiah or not, knew he was someone special, someone who would be spoken of for years to come. Even if they didn't believe he had any spiritual power, they wanted their children to tell his stories and be able to say, I touched him.

But, in that kind of world, as progressive as it might have been, women were respected less than even the lowest of men, and children were even farther down the line. Children were incapable of providing for themselves or doing anything without the help of others. They were fully dependent on others. They weren't able to contribute to society so they hadn't earned respect. And that's how respect and human dignity was treated, as something you had to earn to receive. So again, Jesus is busy, children shouldn't bother him.

While we comfortably read these three verses and secretly pat ourselves on the back because we aren't like the disciples, we welcome children into our churches. We support them in our community. We take joy in passing on our trades be it recipes, needlework, auto repair, or wood work. We're doing it right, we're welcoming the children. Remember, our schedules, our lives, revolve a lot around them. Yet, that's not Jesus' point. His point is serve those we deem as fully dependant. To do something for the ones we refer to as "those" or "that kind" or "your kind". To care for everyone, even those who you think are unworthy. To serve those that can never pay you back. The kingdom is for everybody. Let those who cannot stand on their own, come to Jesus. Let those who are refugees, come to Jesus. Let everyone come to Jesus, by serving as Jesus.

Jesus says whoever does not receive the kingdom, like a child does, will never enter it. I don't have the romantic picture of everyone being blown

away in jaw dropping wonder and amazement every time they experience Christ. When someone pays it forward. When someone returns the wallet we dropped. We're surprised and in awe of receiving the kingdom of Christ's love. But so often when don't respond that way. In our busy lives someone welcomes us into their home. A neighbor shares the fruits of their garden. We're appreciative, but not always in awe of those experiences. And I don't think it's simply because we're adults. I work with kids. I live with kids. I was once a kid. I know that kids are not always good receivers. Try this new food, just take a bite... Kids aren't always good receivers.

Yet children, regardless of the year, country or their surroundings, are always discounted people. They are never viewed like adults are viewed. They are always dependant of others. I think that's what allows us to receive Christ throughout various times in our day, week, and life. When we realize we are all, especially ourselves, dependant on others. When we allow ourselves to receive from our neighbor, to receive from the homeless as well as the connected. When we love and serve others, we are receiving the kingdom. When we love and serve others we are being the kingdom. That image we have of the children coming to Jesus, that's not a fairytale, that's the kingdom.

Jesus takes us up in his arm, lays his hands upon us, and blesses us. The child in me, that still likes to touch things, thinks it's so cool that I get say, I was blessed by him. I was met with Christ telling me to come to him and I accepted him, and life changed for me for the better. Amen.