

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019**

## **Message: Let the Children Come to Me**

**Let us pray before we carry on:** - That there is something in here for everyone today.

From cover to cover, the Bible is a revelation about the nature of God and the condition of the human race. What kind of God is God? Who can come to God? Who is acceptable to God? On what basis?

Last week Randal spoke of the coming of the Kingdom of God – it is certainly coming and no one except the Father knows when. But when it does come, we will not be in any doubt. The question is, who will be in it?

We also saw the Bridge Illustration. Talk about the condition of human kind.... This is us:

Our condition is this – we are separated from God. That leads to death. But we have been given an answer – a way to bridge that gap. That bridge is Jesus.

As we continue heading towards Easter, our focus turns to Jesus. He is on his way to Jerusalem and to His triumphal entry, but also to His death. Time is running out and things for Jesus are getting serious. The increasing focus on His Kingdom suggests an urgency and an importance that we should take heed of.

Before we dive into today's passage, and just in case you have not been studying Luke recently, let's get some context:

Having spoken about the coming kingdom, at the beginning of Chapter 18 Luke writes that Jesus went on to tell the disciples the parable of the Persistent Widow – basically meaning that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. The point of this parable was that God, who always does right and is filled with compassion for believers who suffer, will certainly respond to his beloved ones who cry for his help. However, in verse 8, Jesus finishes with these sobering words... "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" Jesus follows this with the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector – a perfect illustration of how a sinner who is without any personal righteousness is made righteous before God instantaneously through an act of repentant faith when he said, "Have mercy on me a sinner...".

Later, beginning in verse 18, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples about the Rich Ruler who learns that despite his adherence to the letter of the law, it was not enough to guarantee him eternal life. No doubt he was sincere, but his faith was superficial and Jesus sees right to his heart. Jesus lays it on really thick - there was nothing a person could do to get into the Kingdom. Not even a Pharisee or a Rich Man could earn their way into God's Kingdom. And in those days, it was Pharisees and rich people who were deemed to be the elite and the entitled – if anyone was going to be in God's Kingdom it would be them.

And so, here we have 3 verses squeezed in between a proud religious ruler and a rich young ruler. Let's read...

**Luke 18: 15 – 17;**

**Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "let the children come to me,**

**and 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.”**

Like Matthew and Mark, this is Luke’s account of precious children being brought to Jesus for blessing.

**<sup>15</sup> Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them...**

As mentioned earlier, Jesus and the disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. There were many other people with them - we know this because Matthew records the same events and talks of large crowds. A group of parents clearly wanted to have Jesus touch and pray for their babies, to bless them. In fact, the language used says that parents kept bringing their babies and small children. Just as we do, the Jews wanted their children to be right in terms of their eternity. It was not unusual for parents to bring children to respected Rabbi’s for prayers and blessings. One of the most popular blessings was that children would grow to be “sons and daughters of the law, strong and faithful in marriage and known by good works.” That is not so different to us is it?

**<sup>15</sup> ...and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.**

Bringing infants to Jesus doesn’t sound controversial but clearly it was and the opposition comes from a most unlikely source – Jesus’ own disciples! We don’t know for sure what was going on in their minds, but clearly, they were annoyed, and they let it be known in no uncertain terms! Remember they were all on their way to Jerusalem and that would have been on their minds. The work of re-establishing Israel to its right place – that is likely what they were thinking this kingdom stuff was all about. These people were getting in the way of the real work to be done. Jesus’ time was precious – too important to be wasted on children.

**<sup>16</sup> But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them,”**

In verse 15 it was babies being brought to him – but here Jesus widens his brief to include children.

In Mark it says Jesus was indignant! Jesus was really upset with the disciples for preventing the little children from coming to him. Perhaps the biggest mistake made by the disciples was making themselves the gatekeepers of who can and who can’t come to Jesus. On this occasion, the disciples failed to realise the heart of Jesus, the compassion of Jesus, and the importance of the touch of Jesus – even for little children.

Let us not overlook the second part of this verse - When Jesus said “**do not hinder them..**” he was saying to the disciples – get out of their way!!

On a side-note: Are there things that we are doing that may hinder our children coming to Jesus? I risk sticking my neck out here – but oh well, I seem to do that a bit lately..... One of the biggest errors of our time, is the notion some parents have that they’ll let their children grow up and when they are old enough they can decide whether or not to choose to come to Christ or go to church. As the song goes, “Jesus loves the little children”. He loves our children and God wants us to bring them to Jesus. Action is involved. He is not interested in excuses for why we won’t. There could be any number of reasons why the disciples were hindering the children: inconvenience, time, mission, priorities. Current excuses could perhaps include: sporting obligations, school obligations, Sunday is the only day they have to sleep in, etc. Something for us to think about... Or what about the place children are given some churches – seen and not heard... We went to a Church in Singapore for example where the children didn’t even come to the main gathering. Right from the start they were in their own gatherings - downstairs. Now they were in Sunday School yes – but still..... We didn’t

last long there. We have a responsibility as a whole Church to support parents in their efforts to bring their children to Jesus. More about that later.

It is such a great picture – Jesus having so much interest in the youngest of children. Having the time and space to welcome the little children to come to him. And Blessing them. From my reading I understand that this is the only time Jesus blessed anyone who had not openly declared their faith in him, while he was here on earth. Interesting.

But the text is explicit – Jesus called them. In fact, he went a step further and points to them as being perfect candidates for the kingdom of God!

**<sup>16</sup>...for to such belongs the kingdom of God.**

What did he mean here? Well it is pretty black and white right? He is saying simply the kingdom of God belongs to children like this. Not specifically to the children in front of him but to children like this – little children. My understanding of this verse is pretty straight forward. God has a special place for children and he considers them to be a part of his Kingdom from the outset.

2 Samuel 12:16 – 22 – READ

This is a great story of faith and of love. While he thought there was still a chance that his child would be saved, David prayed and fasted and pled with the Lord. Once he knew that death had come he got up and washed and changed his clothes – why the change? I would suggest David was certain that the child had gone to be with the Lord.

With that in mind, it is pretty clear then why Jesus was so indignant that the disciples had prevented the parents from bringing the children to him. He considered them a part of his kingdom. Babies and young children. No qualifications or special conditions. Children and babies, such as these, belong to the kingdom.

Now. Have I asked Quest and Bravo to stay in today because you are young children and so this was about you? Absolutely not. In fact, the complete opposite... Does today's passage mean that all children are saved so if you've attended Sunday School you're all good? The bible seems to indicate that children who have not reached a certain age of accountability, are saved by grace.

But I would suggest that you are no longer young children and with that comes personal decisions to make.

As a father, I am deeply concerned with the fate of my daughter. I want her to go to heaven not to hell. As parents, Julie and I have bought her up as best we know, to be exposed to the Gospel – from us, from her wider family, and from you our Church family. In fact, one of the most significant reasons for us returning to Dunedin when we came back from Singapore was because we wanted Sophia to grow up spiritually, here, in this place. This is all we can do – the rest is not up to us; it is up to her and it is up to God. Because I suggest that Sophia is no longer a young child and that in fact she now has to be responsible for her own decisions. That is between her and God and it is our hope and prayer that she chooses a life with Jesus.

To the young people in here this morning - as a Christian, as a friend to some of you, as an uncle to some of you, as a Member of this Church and as a part of the body of Christ, I am also deeply concerned about your eternal destiny, as I am of Sophia's.

It is my view that you are now all of an age where that statement from Jesus no longer applies to you. Where you have been considered part of the kingdom by virtue of your being young children – you now need to make your own decisions in regard to your faith in Jesus. Just like the rest of us...

I believe the key to this passage lies with Jesus words in verse 17. How better can he emphasise his lessons on faith than with babies and children? At that age they have done nothing, achieved nothing, earned nothing, learnt nothing that could get them into the kingdom. Yet Jesus says it is to these that the kingdom belongs.

Without any apology or qualification, Jesus doesn't just put his toe over the line, but leaps completely out of bounds, at work we call this swimming outside the flags, and adds:

**<sup>17</sup>Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.**

Presumably he says this for the benefit of those who thought they were a shoe in... unless you enter like a child you will not come in.

Wow – but I thought Paul said that when I was a child I thought like a child and spoke like a child but now I am all grown up and I have put childish things away?

We are not talking about being childish (short-tempered, self-serving, self-absorbed little creatures) - those are all negative things that come with being a child. Jesus said that we should receive the kingdom of God like a child – he is pointing to the qualities of dependence, innocence, humility.

Christian songwriter, Gloria Gaither, puts it like this:

‘Children possess an uncanny ability to cut to the core of the issue, to expose life to the bone, and strip away the barnacles that cling to the hull of our too sophisticated pseudo-civilization. One reason for this, I believe, is that children have not mastered our fine art of deception that we call “finesse.” Another is that they are so “lately come from God” that faith and trust are second nature to them. They have not acquired the obstructions to faith that come with education; they possess instead unrefined wisdom, a gift from God.’

#### **APPLICATION:**

There are some things in here for us aren't there?

Those of us who consider ourselves to have grown up in the faith, - do we have faith like a child?

That does not mean we do not learn and grow and develop and mature in our knowledge and understanding of the word and personal development as we become more like Jesus. But do we retain the child-like features of faith? Do we come to Jesus totally dependent upon him? Trusting Him completely and with humility?

Those of us that are a part of this church family: What are we doing to ensure that we are not hindering the children among us from coming to Jesus? More than that, are we actively seeking to put them in front of Jesus?

Sophia was dedicated here on Christmas Eve, 2006. I watched it again the other day. The Church family agreed to support her and to help her grow in the faith. If you were dedicated here too, then this Church said the same thing to you. Did you know that? If, like me, you were not dedicated here – aren't you glad you are here now because these people sitting with you, will do whatever they can to support you as you grow up in the faith. Isn't that right?

There is a cake stall sale after Church today. The funds are all going to help our young people, and their friends go to Easter Camp. If Easter Camp is not one of the modern ways in which we help our children come to Jesus – then what is? That was not an advert but if it helps then so be it...

To the young people, in fact to anyone who has not made a commitment to follow Jesus: It is not all one way. You too have plenty to offer this Church family – Paul reminded Timothy, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

How beautiful this is read along with the command to have a child-like faith. Young people, or people young in the faith or brand new this morning... your role in this place is not simply to learn but it is also to be an example to us all. That is what Church is. Everyone has a part to play.

But no one else can make that decision for you. Maybe not today, but maybe. Think back on all the things you have been taught in Sunday School, in Quest, in Youth Bravo, at Youth Group, from your parents, from others in the Church. The things you have heard as you have been coming along here – maybe as Randal said last week some of you are here kicking the tyres – this is for you too. Are you ready to make your own decision of faith and to commit your life to Jesus?

We started with the Bridge illustration. Let’s have another look at it this morning:

You have to decide – am I going to make a decision to put my faith in Jesus and bridge the gap between me and God? Because that is the most important decision you need to make in your life. That decision now is yours and your alone.

Shall we pray?