

In this story, Jesus is a teacher and he is surrounded by his male students. In the culture, it was here that males were to be focused on the wisdom of the teacher and not be distracted by the sounds of young children. Children were considered non-persons and were to spend their time with their mothers. There was a hierarchy in the society with men on top, women second in line, and children way down at the bottom.

But as Jesus so often does, Jesus throws society's hierarchies upside down. Instead of saying, whoever wants to be first must be a male sitting in a classroom with an educated teacher; Jesus instead says that whoever wants to be first must welcome the child among them. "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me," Jesus says.

As I was reading this text this morning, I was struck by how I think this congregation does a pretty good job of welcoming children. Think about worship this morning. We began worship this morning with an 8 year old boy playing the organ. We see young people leading us in singing. We see young people who have gone out to collect the Dimes for Hunger. There are children's bulletins and a nursery. After worship each child has a place where they are invited to learn stories about Jesus, why we worship, and why we study the Bible. They will be welcomed by adults who teach them about what we value as a congregation.

But many of you do not get to see how many children find themselves ministered unto in this facility during the week. In this chancel area on Thursday morning, about 35 of the 50 plus children that come to preschool sit here with two pastors, me and Jim Moss from Tirzah. We sing songs, we read a story from the Bible, we pray, we light and extinguish these candles which remind us that God is here.

These children leave from the chancel area and continue on in the morning where they are cared for by loving adults who teach them important life lessons like learning to play with other children, develop good habits, and learn tools to prepare them to enter school.

This past Monday here, Cub Scouts gathered first in this sanctuary and then spread throughout the building. Two weeks ago there were about 12 scouts in the building. This past week that number reached somewhere around 40 Scouts. On Monday evening, these Scouts pledged to do their duty to God and to this country, to help other people and to obey the law of the pack.

There are lots of ways that this congregation does a very good job of living out what Jesus teaches concerning the place of children. "Welcome me," he says, "by welcoming the children." Between preschool, scouting, and Sunday morning, over 100 kids are being ministered unto by and through this congregation. You should feel very good about how you are being ministers to the children around you.

But I think that Jesus would always want to open our eyes to the children around us who are being left out or forgotten about for one reason or another. Children that don't fit, children whose parents can't enroll them in preschool, children who don't have parents who can bring them to Scouts and volunteer to help them, children whose families don't attend a place of worship.

Earlier we collected the Dimes for Hunger offering. The money collected in these buckets will be added to money from other buckets and much of this money will go to provide food for children who do not have food to eat. It will feed the child in Honduras who wakes up every day to a dirt floor and no shoes on their feet. The child who has never had a new outfit and who bathes in the river polluted from the sewage of Tegucigalpa.

This money will be used to buy food for the child here in York County whose father is out of work and whose mother is trying to find some way to feed her three children. The child who stands shyly behind her mother when her mother picks up her box of food from PATH.

This money will be used to buy food for the classmates of children here today whose only meals come from the meals they receive at school during breakfast and lunch. This money will pay for meals for young people whose school uniforms conceal how destitute their family is. This offering is an important offering in feeding many children who are hungry today.

But as I ponder this passage, I realize there are other ways we can live out this passage of Scripture in our daily lives. Think for a moment about places where you encounter children. It may be the children in your own home. It may be grandchildren that come by to visit you ever so often. It may be the child that irritates you because they have worn a dirt path in your yard.

It may be the child you encounter at school where you are a teacher. It may be the child that you see in front of you in line as you stand to buy groceries or some other item. It may be the child of the person you encounter in your work or recreation. It may be the child that you encounter on the Habitat work site over the next two weeks. It may be the child that you look over and happen to notice in the front yard of a home.

As you think about the children that you may come in contact with this week, what do you think Jesus' words mean to you? Do you think it means that when you come in contact with that child that you should dismiss this child as less than the adult standing next to the child? Do you think it means that you ignore that child? Do you think it means you are to see this child as a nuisance? Do you think it means you can ignore the children that are slaves in the sex industry? Or ones that work in sweat shops? Or do you think Jesus means it when he says, "When you welcome a child you welcome me?"

There are some simple things we can do to live out this passage and some things which will require greater effort. One very simple thing that we can do when we encounter children this week is to bend down to their level and talk to them in a way that shows that they are important. Don't talk from up here but instead talk from eye level. To speak to a child from eye level shows them that they are important.

There are some of us here who are teachers and parents of young children. I don't have to say anything to you about how important children are. You are devoting your life to children. But sometimes even the best of parents and teachers can become worn out by the endless energy that children can drain from you. Sometimes the best parents and teachers can lose sight of how important it is to raise and teach young people. Know that what you do is important. Don't ever lose the vision that called you into teaching or that led you to become a parent.

Others of us don't teach but there are other ways that we can reach out to children. Learn about the ways that children are exploited around the world and take up a cause which benefits children that are trapped in one way or another. In the bulletin today, there are requests from the Clover School system for lunch buddies and from the Scout leaders for additional Scout leaders. There are sports programs in our area that are searching for quality leaders. My Dad is 80 years old but still finds the energy to show up at Annie Burnside Elementary School in Columbia and volunteer his time helping out with 4th graders.

Jesus says that whenever we welcome a child we welcome him. As we encounter children this week we may be encountering the risen Christ. AMEN.

Text: Mark 9:30-37

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