



**October 4, 2009**

Preaching: Rev. Jim Best

Mark10:13-16

## “Could I Be Any More Like A Child?”

*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.*

A few months back, I was in the driveway, unloading groceries and two women from the neighborhood were out for a walk. They stopped at the bottom of the driveway and called me over. They wanted to tell me that their children were still afraid of my house from last Halloween, and that last year their kids had stood on the sidewalk and dared each other to go up and ring the doorbell. It was the best news I had heard all day!

See, I love Halloween, and I always have. The chance to decorate the house and scare the kids is something I look forward to every year. I buy a few new things every year, and the windows of my home are filled with skulls and ghosts. Spider webs cover the bushes and giant spiders sit in the trees. Motion sensors activate flashing lights and screaming sound effects, and the smoke machine on the roof covers the whole yard with a fog-like haze. When it comes to Halloween, I go all out, and I have a lot of fun! When it comes to Halloween, I act just like a big kid!

When I read the gospels in the Bible, I often get the impression that the Disciples weren't a lot of fun. Do you know what I mean? They always seem to

be arguing or complaining, or telling people "No. Don't do that!" Jesus on the other hand, seems to be having fun. Perhaps it is simply the way I read the stories, but it seems to me that Jesus is much more laid back than the disciples. And I think that is why, in today's reading, Jesus tells them to relax and let the children come to him. Further, he tells them that to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, they must accept God as if they were a child themselves.

Think about the implications for the disciples. I mean these were Jewish men, who had been taught all their lives that if they wanted to get into heaven, they had to follow the rules. They had to be serious, strict, disciplined. But now Jesus tells them that they have to be like a child! I picture the disciples watching the proceedings with a different eye. Imagine the disciples watching the rest of the children as they are brought forward to meet this smiling messiah who lays his hands on them and blesses them. Imagine the children's faces, and their eyes as they stare up at this important man whom their parents have brought them to see.

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. These were Jesus' words. So what does that mean? What does it mean to receive something as a little child?

When I think of this, I think about Christmas. Think about that childlike joy you had when it was Christmas morning and you were finally going to get to open all those presents! That excitement you felt, and probably still feel watching someone you love open a present that you picked out especially for them. I think these are the kinds of feelings, the kind of emotions that Jesus wants us to feel when we think about God.

There are a lot of qualities that children possess that we in today's society seem to outgrow. A big one is energy and enthusiasm. Kids would run everywhere if you let them, just for the sake of running. Kids get excited easily and often dive into tasks with a level of excitement and energy that makes me tired just watching them. I mean have you ever watched a child dance? There is an energy there, a sense of total abandonment that we as adults just don't have. As adults, we worry that people will laugh or make fun of our dancing, but a child? A child just leaps into it and gives themselves to the rhythm with uncaring enthusiasm.

Another quality is a sense of innocence and wonder. Children, especially young ones, get excited about everything. New things are often greeted with sighs and smiles. Whenever have gone to movies or shows with my young nieces and nephews, I have had as much fun watching their faces as watching the shows. I still remember the look on my niece Sarah's face the first time we took her to

Disney World. Everything was amazing...everything was new...everything was an object of wonder.

Which leads into another wonderful characteristic of children, they are accepting. Children don't worry about the same things that adults do, and on the whole, worry far less. Children aren't cynical. Children often think the best of everyone and everything, and Trust that everything will work out in the end. Good will triumph over evil. People will do the right thing. These concepts are as real and as obvious to a child as that the sun rises in the East, and that their parents love them.

These are the sorts of qualities that Christ wants us to have as members of his church, as parts of his body! These are the sorts of qualities that Jesus says we need to have if we are to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And I think that it is just as hard for us today as it was for the disciples all those years ago.

As adults, and even as teens, we are often bitter, cynical, blasé about the world around us, and the people in it. We are often reserved and withdrawn, not willing to step out of our boundaries, or push the envelope too far. We worry about what others will think, what others will do. We try to act in an acceptable manner and not upset the status quo, because we worry about what will happen if we do. We hold grudges where a child would forgive. We worry about ulterior motives and hidden agendas, where a child accepts the words of others, and we see the mundane, where a child sees miracles!

In the old TV show "Joan of Arcadia" Joan asks God for a miracle and God points at a tree and says, "There you go." She says, "That's just a tree." And he says, "Let's see you make one!"

When was the last time that you gave thanks to God for the beauty, for the wonder, for the Miracle of creation that is all around you? Look around you right now. Look at the beauty of these windows and think. Think of the fact that at one point these were piles of sand that were fused by heat, given color and shape and set in lumps of lead to create patterns and images to dazzle the eye. And that all of this is part of the wonders of God's creation, that something as simple as a grain of sand can be a part of something beautiful.

Now look at the people around you. Look at the wonders that they are, at the gifts that they have, at the beauty that they possess. And think of the miracle of all of us together, fused into one as the church, Christ's body in the world.

Here at Baker Memorial we have a vision statement. Loving God, Serving Others, Growing together. We need to take those childlike qualities and apply them to our life in the church; to our vision and our mission.

We need to Love God and all his creation with childlike wonder, and acceptance, and enthusiasm. We need to let go of our prejudices and our cynicism. We need to open our eyes and see things as if for the first time and marvel at all that God has done for us and for the world. And we need to enthusiastically proclaim our love for God, not worrying about what others will think or how we will be perceived, but trusting in the Lord whom we love and whom we follow.

We need to serve others, all others, both without the church and within. It is easy to talk of mission projects here, but serving others can also be teaching or serving on a committee or anything you do for those around you. We need to stop being complacent adults, willing to just sit and be pew potatoes. We need to get up and find that childlike energy to try new things. And we need to let go of our reticence and our worry and stop putting things off, and just jump in and do it! Maybe you want to start a knitting circle, maybe you want to take groceries to the food pantry, maybe you want to serve on the worship committee or be a communion server, or maybe, just maybe you want to be a chaperone on a Senior High Youth retreat, November 20th to 22nd! Whatever it is, you need to find the energy to take up the task, and take joy in the fact that whether it turns out how you planned or not, you need to accept that God is at work, and that it will all turn out in the end.

And finally, we need to grow together. We are all children of God, all part of one universal church, and we are all here today as part of one congregation. And I have to tell you, if we do these other things, if we start finding these qualities within ourselves and apply them to our lives, if we start enthusiastically loving God, if we start serving others with wonder and without fear, then we cannot help but grow closer together. But if we want to make the most, if we want to truly become One congregation, then we need to let go of our cynicism. We need to let go of past hurts or perceived wrongs and we need to forgive as a child forgives. We need to forgive others as God forgives us. We say it every week, don't we, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." But we need to really do it, don't we? With childlike innocence and trust, we need to forgive others as God forgives us.

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. These were Jesus' words. Said to his disciples and now to us. Take them to heart. Open your eyes to the wonders around you. Think about

all you do and all the interactions in your life, and think about how Christ wants you to be; to live your life more like a child!

Amen.

This Sunday is the beginning of our church's Stewardship campaign, and everyone who was here last week, knows just how important this campaign is. Churches all over are struggling financially, and we here at Baker Memorial are no different. I am going to ask Ben and Kathy Adams to come forward and say a few words, and as you listen to what they have to say, I want you to think on today's reading. And I hope that you will embrace this campaign with acceptance and without worry. That you will join in with wonder, and energy and enthusiasm and show your love for God as we serve others and grow together.

**Growing Together** in the Study of God's Word has been important to us through our 25 years here. I will touch on some of the opportunities we've had here.

My first Bible Study was the Disciple I study. While we were stay at home moms, a neighbor, Kim and I made arrangements so we could both attend the Disciple Classes that were offered then.

I watched Kim & Mike's 2 children while they attended the evening class with Clark Holt as leader. And Kim watched Abby & Nate while I attended the morning class led by Ken Crooks. The morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> class meeting, I was disappointed that there were only 2 others and thought the class might be cancelled. But...

"Where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

This proved to be true because Edith, Lisa, and I grew together in some great discussions and study of the Old Testament.

Ben and I took the United Methodist's 3 day "Walk to Emmaus" a while ago. Jennifer Swenson is participating right now in Plano on her Walk. Ask her about it! If you'd like to attend the Walk, ask someone who's done it. It's an amazing opportunity to strengthen your faith. As told in Luke 24, two men are walking to Emmaus. A stranger walks with them as they lament the death of Jesus 3 days earlier. It is not until they break bread with the "stranger" that they recognized that he is the **risen** Jesus!

Afterwards they said "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

May our hearts burn within *us*, as we recognize Jesus in our Bible studies and classes.

I am so grateful for our pastors for the sermons they deliver each Sunday. But our Christian teachers are not only our pastors. There are many lay persons who want to share their love and study of God's word with us. After our Walk to Emmaus, we studied with the Starrs. Ben and I joined an evening Disciple II class led by Dan Starr and the 10:30 Sunday class led by Kim. The 10:30 class is now called "Faith Quest" and is now led by many individuals.

Currently, Ben is attending a Thursday morning men's Bible Study here at Baker and I am privileged to be studying the book of John with the women's study group, "Debra in the Palms" led by Paula Hall.

Right now, Ben and I are also attending the 9:00 Sunday class led by our staff. The class uses a video each week and is based on John Wesley's book "Three Simple Rules".

So, as you can see, Baker offers many ways we can grow together in study. From our financial gifts, funds are provided for

- Bibles for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders (they are receiving them in today's service!)
- Literature, supplies, and videos for the Sunday School curriculum
- Supplies for Vacation Bible Study
- Financial support for our wonderful pastoral leaders, music leaders, and staff
- Operating costs for this building that provides a safe and comfortable meeting place.

If you aren't already, please consider participating in the wonderful "Growing Together" opportunities that are offered here and prayerfully consider increasing your support for them financially too.

*Kathy Adams*

Last week our Chair of Finances, Allen Scales, presented a timely and honest assessment of our church's financial situation. Perhaps like me your first reaction over this past week was to make a list – of your priorities and your expenses and to fold in some measure of the uncertainty that hangs over so many as our economy remakes itself and we reset our needs, our wants, our commitments.

Maybe stewardship of the church was at the top of your list. Maybe you are prepared to respond to Allen's challenge to the congregation to step forward with increased giving over and above your pledge.

We have been members of Baker Memorial for 25 years and there have been times when our family giving has been inconsistent. Some years we virtually ignored our pledge or were irregular in our giving. There were summers where we were no shows. Supporting the church is not like the water bill or gas bill or the mortgage where physical consequences are the result of not paying your bills.

Now we see things differently. Our church life is not one item on a bullet list of commitments or interests or priorities. The church is the hub that all other things revolve around.

Kathy talked of the importance of "Growing Together". I naturally gravitate more to the phrase "Serving Others". Twenty-one years ago, Reverend Ken Crooks and I were at a planning meeting for the churches that would support a new homeless shelter in Aurora known as Hesed House. During a lull in the meeting, Ken leaned over to me and said that glorious double negative: "There is no way we cannot support this!"

There are many ways to serve others. The need is great.

Stephen's Ministers support individuals with one-on-one caring and friendship. We have a charged up youth program that can only get stronger as more young folks realize the power of getting together in the name of Christ. We have 4 high school youth involved in our refugee tutoring on Wednesday nights - they exude the wonder of sharing their gift of education with those struggling to make sense of the world in a language they do not know. We have a corps of cooks, servers and workers who provide a warm meal in a clean well-lighted place every Wednesday. We have a vibrant adult education program and plenty of chairs for new members to join in.

You all can probably add more to this list.

The truth is each of the ways we serve needs to be bolstered by more direction, more energy and more involvement. Some of that comes from our great staff – ready to guide us to the realization that we as a church are much greater than the the sum of our parts. Most of it comes from us – realizing that putting Christ and His church at the center of everything we do will make reaching our vision by doing our mission a reality. When times are hard and uncertain, we need to focus on the core of our faith and offer even greater support to the church and its mission.

The Bible offers in several places the notion of “first fruits” - where believers reserve the first (and often, best) part of the harvest to God. Farmers offer the best of their produce. Hosts put aside their best for the visitor. In fact, God offered the ultimate first fruit in the sacrifice of his Son.

In practical terms, we offer first fruits today in our giving to the church. One way to do this that avoids the whims of our day-to-day world is to give via the Automated Debit program. It is a way to provide a reliable, timely offering of our first fruits.

Kathy and I have decided to continue our tithing for 2009, via the reliable automatic bank withdrawal program, and to respond to Allen's challenge by offering an extra weekly amount for the remainder of the year.

Just as important, we will continue to offer our time, talent, and treasures in 2010 to advance the vision of making our church a hub of Christ-directed activity radiating out to the world from the heart of St. Charles.

*Ben Adams*