



**PASTOR GWEN'S SERMON
20TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
"LET THE CHILDREN COME"
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2024**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Our Gospel text for this morning is on a topic that most preachers would like to bypass and only have to preach on at weddings. Marriage. And certainly, they would prefer not to have to talk about divorce **ever**. Well, as I looked back at the last four times this text was our lesson in 2021, 2018, 2015, and 2012, I found that I did preach on both marriage and divorce. So, this morning, I decided to take a break and talk about the last part of our lesson. "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." Verse 14

Do you remember who Art Linkletter was? He first had a radio show in 1945 that moved to television and ran from 1959 to 1967. It was centered on "Kid's Say the Darndest Things". I read an article this week about Linkletter in the Associated Press that said he asked a group of first graders once to finish these statements and here are some of their answers:

Don't count your chickens before..... and one little girl said, "before you fry them".
People who live in glass houses.....a little boy answered, "shouldn't be seen using the bathroom."
It's better to be safe..... a boy answered, "than on fire".
Don't bite the hand..... A child answered, "that is not clean".
No news is..... Another answered, "boring".
Sticks and stones may break my bones,.....a little boy said, "but hug's won't".

You get the idea. I would love to ask these questions of the children today. I do think that it is more difficult being a youngster these days, than when we were growing up. When I was younger coke was a soft drink. Drugs were what your parents got you from the drug store when you were sick. Crack was what a window did if you threw a snowball at it. For me today it is the sound of the bat hitting the ball in a Brewers game.

Today, too many children in this country, right here in Park Falls are food insecure. Many families have no health insurance. And then there are children who are homeless, sex trafficked, abused, and forgotten. For too many children, it is just plain dangerous to be a kid in the US today. No wonder the rate of suicide for children and teens is so high.

As a nation, we have to be smarter about how we are raising our children. And if you don't have enough compassion to help raise the young today, then at least you might have some self-interest. These children of today are going to be the leaders of tomorrow. They will be the ones in our nursing homes taking care of us, that is if the homes can find people to work and care for us. They

will be the leaders of our government, controlling social security, and making the laws. What future will we have if we live to a ripe old age in the hands of young men and women who grew up in such terrible childhoods? Folks, it is our job to “train up the child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it”. Proverbs 22:6 We need to help care for, teach them, pray over them, and love them all, not just our own children and grandchildren. For Jesus blessed them all. And he wants them all to come to him.

Think with me for a few minutes, how do children today learn anything? They watch parents, adults, hopefully go to school and surf the internet. But now the real question, how do they know to come to Jesus, if we don't tell them. In Jesus' day the parents brought their children to Jesus for a blessing. Often that does not happen our society today. We need to make the effort to bring children to Jesus or bring Jesus to them. How often do we do that? Many parents today do not know Jesus either, so it follows that they will not be the ones to tell their kids about Jesus. You don't know what you are missing unless you see, hear, or are exposed to it.

So, what do we do? First, of all I think we need to pray for opportunities to bring Jesus into a conversation with a parent or a child. We also need to not be afraid to begin conversations about Jesus with others. We need to find the children that are home on a Sunday morning and find a way to bring them to church. Our mission field is right here in Park Falls and Springstead. I would guess that 90 % of children are home this morning and not in a church. That is a great mission field. Don't need to go to Africa or Somalia to bring Jesus to the unchurched. We simply need to take an aggressive role in reaching these children who are not here this morning. God has blessed us all with a mind to think up ideas. So, let's try to do that for the next few weeks. We have Sleep in Heaven Peace who makes and delivers beds to children in our community. There are children's Bibles we have purchased to give to those families if they should be interested in having one. Maybe we should throw a neighborhood party for children to come have some snacks, receive a gift, and hear the real Christmas story from Luke. Not “Twas the night before Christmas.” Remember that it is not their fault that they do not know the real Christmas story or about God's love for them, or who Jesus is. Or should we get involved in the new YMCA, which stands for Young Men's Christian Association? The YMCA is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. Sounds like a no-brainer to me. But we have to take on the challenge Jesus sets before us and get involved, not just write a check. I have talked to the new director and asked if we could sponsor the 6th-grade overnight activity that they would like to do when the facility gets built. What an opportunity to spend time with 10- and 11-year-olds? Someone of you has to step up, get involved, take on the project, and pave the way for a conversation about Jesus.

Another one of our organizations that we support with our 5% tithe is JPD Warrior Fund. The Donner family lost their son to suicide, and they continue to bring to Park Falls speakers the kids relate to so as to give the kids the tools they need to cope and not choose suicide as a solution. In February, we are looking forward to having one of their programs here. Saturday, October 26th, Christ the Servant is going downtown to Trunk or Treat to give out sweet treats and some bookmarks, balls, and other trinkets with Scripture on them. I will also print out an invitation to toss in the bags about our Advent series and Christmas worship schedule.

It was probably a few months ago now that Kurt and I sat in my office and talked about what we can do better or more of in the community to help kids. I hope that you will join in the activities I have mentioned as well as do some brainstorming as to what else we can do to have contact with children, so we can have the opportunity to share God's love and talk about Jesus with them.

This year, we have 4 children in total, including those in confirmation and Sunday school. I hope that you will come to one of their classes. It is such a joy to have them around. And even if they go home and don't remember a thing about the lesson, I am always hopeful that they can see and hear the excitement in Margaret's and my voice during that time we spend together talking about Jesus and the stories in the Bible. Every time we meet, I am reminded that I too am a child of God! Think of all the blessings we have by knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior. What an amazing God we have!

I remember when I was interviewed for this call and someone on the call committee asked me how I would get more children to come to Christ the Servant. I told them in no uncertain terms that I was not having any more children, but together we can find a way to do so, and I still believe that.

Well, the time is now. Invite a family in your neighborhood with kids to come to church on Sunday. If the family isn't interested, ask if you can take a child of theirs. Bring your own grands to church, if possible, even if it is when they are visiting. I want to challenge you to find a child or a family to ask to come to worship. Oct 20th is a great day to come as we have that surprise in store for all who attend, not to mention a potluck meal. Yummmmm Be creative, and if you cannot do this alone, get a few of you together and think about how this could happen or what other mission projects might get kids in our pews or at our youth education opportunities. Then, together, we can tell children about Jesus. Together, we can have fun telling children about Jesus. It's not work but rather a blessing for you to do so.

We are all God's children. Don't ask me why God loves us so much from birth on, but He does. Let's try to make an effort, to share that love with even the little ones so they too can be part of the greatest kingdom on earth. "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is too such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

I have one last story to tell. Wouldn't it be nice if this story were true of every child in our community?

In 1931, a young boy named Jimmy went to church on a Sunday with a neighbor kid. When he got home, he could not stop talking about how wonderful it was and that he wanted to go back again next Sunday. And so Jimmy got up the next week and went to church with the neighbor's family. This continued for several weeks. His parents started to think about Jimmy going with the neighbors every Sunday morning. They decided that if something there enticed a 5-year-old to go to church, maybe they should check it out. The following Sunday, they got up early and went to church with little Jimmy. They began to attend every Sunday, became members, and participated at that same church every Sunday until they were called home to heaven. That little boy, Jimmy, was my dad. Let the children come! AMEN