

Proper 22 B  
October 7th, 2018  
Mark 10: 2-16  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

## **The Little Ones**

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them."

Let the children come to me. We adults would like a neat, orderly, quiet space for worship. No spurious noises. Children make noises. They squirm. They wiggle. They want to show you what they made. They will make noise while the ever so important sermon is being preached. Some would have them banished from the church as a distraction. Some would relegate them to another place in the building. But Jesus says let the little children come to him. And then he adds for us high-minded adults, "For to such belongs the kingdom of God.

I have learned that the noise of children in a church is a good thing. Without it, such communities are doomed to disappear. Children are a blessing in disguise in our midst. They bring us new life and hope. They bring us joy and wonder. These things are all too easy to lose. They bless us with their presence. They draw us out of ourselves, if we let them, and cause us to care and love for someone else beside ourselves, whether they are part of our family or if they are simply children we see out in the community.

I remember the feeling of realizing I would give my life for my son when he was born, this vulnerable small little baby. For the first time in my life, someone else was more important to me than me. This is a natural experience for a parent. But by extension, what adult, on seeing a child in peril, would not readily be willing to lay down their own life to save that child from harm or further peril? How many times has a stranger run into the street to save a young child who wandered out there? No one is looking for a reward or honor here, just the wellbeing of a helpless little child.

Consider the blessings which children bring us:

- Trust They trust people around them. They are not cynical. They can show us it is possible to trust, better to trust than to doubt.
- Love They look up to us and love us, not for who we are in the world, but for who we are to them.
- Hope for the future Not a tired cliché, but a real hope that life will go on, and perhaps, someday, they will get it right where we failed.
- Joy –Children are full of joy and happiness. Little things bring them joy and our joy is renewed in their discoveries over things that have long since lost their luster for us.
- Wonder-Children find wonder in the simplest of daily miracles, a wonder that we have lost or become jaded about. They challenge us to rediscover that wonder, that sense of magic about all God’s creation and of the wideness of our universe.
- Play- inviting us to play with them and regain our own childhoods. I loved the chance to play Legos with my son. We built many things together and I enjoyed his engaging with his own creativity to make new things.
- They draw us out of ourselves to love and care for someone else. They make our world larger!

Today we bless animals after our church service. As we remember the blessing that children are in our lives and the blessing that Jesus gives to them, it is not far off from that to think about the animals who are part of our lives and our families.

Indeed, why bless the animals?

Simply because they bless us.

- They bless us with their presence in our lives.
- They bring us comfort when we need it. They are the world’s greatest stress relievers.
- There is their antics and their playfulness as they invite us to join them in simple play, something we may not have done in years, or get few chances in our busy lives to do,
- They are home for us.
- They give us their friendship and are companions to us. You can not be lonely when an animal lives with you.
- Most of all, there is the unconditional love that they offer you. They don’t care what kind of day you had. They are not going to make the end of it bad. They love you no matter what, even after you yell at them for spilling their food bowl or having an accident. They come back to you and love you, no matter what.

Animals have been known to save their owner's lives. I have a patient whose dog saved their life when the smoke detector did not go off in their home and the dog woke them up and got them out in time. Still other dogs act as service animals, helping the blind to see and the deaf to hear and those who are physically challenged to gain mobility. Still others offer their lives to protect us and to root out crime and danger in our midst as they serve in many local police departments. And have you visited a nursing care facility to see the joy that a community pet can bring to people whose lives have been drained of most everything else, what a visit from an animal can do? How much it helps them when they get to pet the animals! Here animals perform a great service to us and are a blessing in the last years of our lives.

Trust. To have an animal learn to trust you is a blessing. The animals trusted Francis of Assisi. He was a simple, open, holy person, who exuded the love of God from his pores. Animals have a sixth sense about judging who they can trust, and are reluctant, "wild" and cautious about doing so with those who are untrustworthy. Almost instinctively they can discern those who authentically care about them from those who wish to use and abuse them because God put us in charge of creation. Sadly, there are those who do not take this responsibility seriously.

In the Adult forum last week, we watched the movie "A Dog Year" about a dog that had been abused and an animal welfare league had trouble getting adopted. He was called, "the dog from hell." Yet the movie showed the story of how love won out and trust between the animal and his adopted person grew to the point where the human being had more to learn from the dog, and how the dog changed his relationships with other human beings. Animals are not born mean. They learn that behavior from the way they are treated by humans. And the movie gave hope that that behavior can be un-learned with love and patience.

And so, today we bless the animals, not only those who come for a blessing today, but the many others we do not see who have blessed us, our family, friends, and neighbors with their presence in our lives. We remember the gift they are to us. Why do we bless the animals? Because they bless us! Thank you God for the blessing of our animals! AMEN