

7 October 2018

Let the Children Come to Me

Text: Mark 10:13-16

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

In confirmation class, our confirmands are learning what the words Law and Gospel mean. Part of the reason I ask them to learn that is because it's good for any Christian to understand the difference between Law and Gospel. We also learn about it because it helps them take sermon notes. I encourage them to ask the question: what is Law in pastor's sermon, what is Gospel in pastor's sermon. I explained to them that Law, on the most basic level, is a command from God. Things like, "Thou shalt have no other gods", "Honor your father and your mother", "love your neighbor as yourself", and even "Let the children come to me" are all Law. They are Law because they are commanded by God, not pastor, not mom and dad, not the teachers, the police, etc., but from God. Now there are other things, deeper theological things, we could say about Law but for now, this will do.

Gospel on the other hand is about God saving us. In Gospel passages we look for words like "saved," "salvation", "grace", etc. Examples would be, "For unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. That's Gospel. God dying on the cross to save us. We can understand that, at least on the most basic level. Our confirmands are learning to understand it as well.

The verse I've chosen for the sermon today is from our Gospel text this morning. Now, before I go any further, the use of the word Gospel here is in accordance with the Greek heading for this book and that heading is, "The Gospel (or Good News) According to St. Mark". The word Gospel here is not Gospel but tells us that in this book, you will find the Gospel of Jesus Christ for you. Listen to the Word of our Lord again, "**Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.**" (Mark 10:15). When we look at this verse alone, in the context of Law and Gospel, what would you say it is based on the definition I've given you. Is this verse Law or is it Gospel? Now I'm not going to put you on the spot about it, but I will tell you it's both, Law and Gospel. It is Law because it's a command, "Let the children come to me" and "do not hinder them". But it is also Gospel, "for to such belongs the kingdom of God".

So what are we to make of this verse today in the context in which it is written and how does it fit into our context today within the context of Law and Gospel. The answer is

this: **God loves children (Gospel) so greatly that He doesn't want them hindered coming to Him (Law).** His love for children and their importance pours from the pages of both the Old and New Testament. For example, we hear in the Old Testament God teaching about sacrificial love and the faith of a child in the story of Abraham and Isaac. Another example of God's great love for children is about Jesse's son David killing Goliath and being anointed King of Israel. And it would be from David's genealogical line, that Jesus would be born of a virgin in Bethlehem. God even tells Adam and Eve in the Garden to be fruitful and to multiply all that He had given them dominion over and to start a family, His family, so that they too may know the Lord their God and Creator. In the New Testament we hear more of the same with Jesus being born a baby in Bethlehem, to save the sins of the world. We learn God's message that we should speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, including those in the womb in the story of Herod and the death of the Holy Innocence. And in the raising of Jairus' daughter, we find God saying, "I love children so much that I wish for them to live with me and never die."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God loves children and they are important to Him. And in our text this morning we see another example of how precious children are to Him. Jesus is in his last six months of His earthly ministries and He and the disciples had been moving throughout the countryside, performing miracles and teaching, and even in our text we find Jesus teaching His disciples about the importance of marriage and divorce. Now I am not going to spend a lot of time preaching about marriage and divorce today except to say that the topic of marriage and divorce is important to God because it's more than just the civil ceremony we see at weddings and court hearings. Rather, marriage and divorce are about the relationship between God and His church, or God and us. So here we find Jesus bringing it up again to the disciples because soon He would turn His eyes toward Jerusalem and the cross and He needed them to try and understand how important His relationship with the church was and continues to be today.

So as Jesus is teaching about marriage and divorce, little children are brought to Jesus. We aren't exactly sure why, maybe it was so they could get closer in order to hear better what Jesus was saying. But we don't really know why. But we do know that when they were brought near, the disciples rebuked those who brought the children with a spirit that "Jesus is too busy for children. They aren't as important anyways". Maybe the disciples said it out of frustration because they were suddenly being overwhelmed by the number of children coming forth. We don't know. What we do know is what we see Jesus doing: He gives the disciples Law for that is what they needed. See, another thing

the Law does is that it shows us our sin, like a mirror. And here Jesus was reminding the disciples that He isn't too busy for children and that they are always welcome to come to Him because He loves them and they are just as precious to Him as you and I are. Or to put it another way, that the children needed to hear the Words of Jesus just as much as the adults did. And so they came forward and Jesus placed them in His arms and on His lap, sharing His good news with them as well.

Friends, when the disciples tried to prevent the children from coming to Jesus, they were hindering them. As innocent as their intentions may have been (hint: they weren't), the message the disciples were teaching the children is that they couldn't understand Jesus because they were children and God didn't have time for them. What about us? Do we hinder our children as well? Do we tell them that God loves them and yet we keep them from the Word afraid that they won't understand what's going on or what God is trying to say? And does the way we live our life teach that God is important as well? Or to put it another way, are we talking the talk or are we walking the walk? I know I am guilty of this. There are times when I catch myself not practicing what I preach on things like forgiveness. When our child does something naughty to another child, we teach them what it means to say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me." But when I am hurt, sometimes I find myself not forgiving others the way that I have taught my children to do, the way God commands us to do. What our children learn about God they will first see modeled in us. If we want them to understand that God is important to us, then we must first show them how important God is to us.

How do we show our children how important God is to us and how much He loves them? How do we train up a child in the way they should go? How do we share Jesus' Good News with our young ones? Simply put, we get out of their way and let them come to Him. We do so by taking every opportunity we have to teach our children about Jesus and His great love for them. We come to church with our children, bringing them to Sunday school and showing them what it's like to sit at the feet of Jesus as a child by attending Bible study. We bring them to worship service, letting them see and hear God's great love for us as they worship along side us on Sunday mornings as we worship our Savior together. We show them the importance of God's Word by bringing them each chance we get, when our Bibles are open so that they can grow in His Word. And after confirmation, we don't quit bringing our children to church. Rather, we bring them again and again thereby laying the foundation of how important God is and how important they are to Him. It's that foundation they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. We do not hinder our children when we continually teach them that church is where we are on Sundays, together, as a family because it is in church where they

confess their sins, receive absolution, hear God's Word spoken to them, and receive His gifts in the Sacraments.

But our text doesn't end with the Law, and neither do we. Listen to how our Gospel reading ends this morning, **"And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them." (Mark 10:16).** To the very little ones that Jesus said, "let them come to me" we find our Lord giving them His grace. That is what He does for children, even you. God gives us, His children, grace, life and salvation. His arms that surround us with His love are the arms that was stretched out on the cross in love for you. His words, spoken from the cross before God, "Father forgive them", He speaks from the font as His blood washes your sins away in the water. The blessings He gave to them are the blessings He gives to you this day, there, at that altar, that grace for you that cost our Lord His life. And His hands that He laid on them, He lays on you in words of Holy Absolution, for you. God's message of letting the children come to him means that He wants us to come to Him too, with all our imperfections and messiness, our frustrations as parents and our failures to be the examples we are called to be.

Parents, children of the Most High God, Law and Gospel is for all of us. It is given to us for our benefit by a heavenly Father who loves us so much that He became one of us, giving His life to save us on the cross. His commands, His Law, draw us close to Him so that we may receive His blood bought gifts for us, freely given on the cross, that sweet gift of the Gospel which gives us life. So come, and bring the children, each time you get a chance, come to the Father who loves you with opened arms, blesses you with His gifts, and lays His hands of on you in His Word and through His Sacraments. Now and forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.