“***Revealed to Infants***” by S. Finlan, for The First Church, July 5, 2020

**Matt 11:16–19, 25–27**

16 “But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,
17 ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ 18For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; 19the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

25 At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

In the first part of today’s Gospel reading, Jesus is sharply ironic. He is saying that they are fickle and flighty, like children. They’re constantly changing their minds about what they want. They don’t know whether or not they want their teachers to be ascetic, that is, abstaining from pleasures such as banqueting and drinking. He may be addressing the religious leaders here, because they are the ones who would discuss whether asceticism is needed.

If the religious leaders had been honest ascetics they would have accepted John, but they did not. If they had been honest *non*-ascetics, they would have appreciated the Son of Man, who came “eating and drinking,” who attended wedding parties and feasts, and told parables about them, too. But they would not listen to Jesus, either. In fact, they slandered him, calling him a drunkard. These thoughtless accusations show that they are, at best, frivolous and, at worst, completely dishonest.

What is the *real* reason they turned away? Verse 17 shows us: “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance.” In other words, neither you nor John would dance to our tune! All we want is control, and you wouldn’t give it to us! We want to stay in control of everything. We don’t have time for moral preachers or prophets.

Jesus is probably addressing the Sadducees, the Jerusalem priests, who control the religious system. He is saying they are shallow, insincere, and childish: just playing a *power* game. They want their game to have a *show* of religion, and they want the prophets to play along.

Who has *really* listened to the Word of God, according to Jesus? It’s the honest and uneducated people: the “infants.” The Father and the Son will reveal themselves to these infants, who are open-minded. Jesus is not affirming ignorance, but is making a contrast between the hypocrisy of the supposedlywise religious authorities and the sincerity of the “infants” who are willing to listen to an original teaching.

We need to be ready to receive truth like a baby receiving milk. It is probably true that most of us are babies, spiritually. It is the *sincerity* and *receptivity* of the infant that Jesus is recommending. Those who are cocky and think they know it all are blocking God out. We need to have an open heart and mind if we would learn more about God.

We need to be infants *to God*. Jesus is not talking about being mentally infantile, or about being an easy victim out there in the cruel world, but about being sincere with *God*, so that we can receive what God is giving.

He is attacking unserious religion, and affirming *honest religion*, represented by the metaphor of infants, and also by his reference to *Wisdom*. He says “Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (11:19). In other words: the proof is in the pudding. Wisdom actually does good deeds. It is genuine. Jesus’ kindness to mothers, fathers, and children would be an example of the genuine goodness of wisdom.

Wisdom both *comes from*, and *leads to* a love of truth and goodness; it *comes from* sincerity, joy, and kindness; and it leads to *more* sincerity, joy, and kindness.

Where has God produced sincerity, joy, and kindness in *your* life? Where do you seek out and study truth and goodness? Do you have spiritual heroes, who embody these values for you? Where in your life do you *appreciate* God’s beauty? These three qualities—sincerity, joy, and kindness—are evidence of God’s *truth, beauty, and goodness* in your life. Sincerity shows the presence of truth. Joy shows the perception of beauty. Kindness reveals the activity of *goodness* in the human heart. And they are all interwoven with love.

You don’t have to possess these things in perfection. It is not perfection, but perfection *hunger*, that admits you to the kingdom. Remember how Jesus said “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt 5:6)? So be *hungry*!That’s what enables God to start filling you.

Be an infant before God. Have the courage to admit your neediness to God. Ask for sincerity, joy, and kindness. I’m guessing you have come to church because you need God, as I do. Here we can share our experiences, and learn about the Father from each other.

Let Jesus operate on you. Let Wisdom work on you. Only the wise are truly free, free from tumultuous passion and anger. Immature people are inclined toward addiction to pleasures or to anger and resentment. Wisdom means one has been freed from this immaturity. The truly wise person is able to listen to others, and does not always need to be right. The wise person can release the burden of being judgmental and defensive. The absence of judgmentalism frees you, and your wisdom is informed by the generosity of love. Wisdom provides stability and freedom.

So give thanks if you need help in this work, need to be more focused, more controlled, more confident. Give thanks that we live in a country where we have the freedom to express our views. Pray that we learn to listen to each other’s views with respect. That would really surprise some people, if they found that those who disagree politically can nevertheless listen to each other with respect. And give thanks if you need Wisdom, if you need Jesus. He is here. Jesus reveals the truth about the Father to us. He knows our needs before we ask. You can ask Jesus to help you grow in wisdom and love.