

Sermon for September 13, 2015 – 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:13–16 (NIV84)

Theme: Let the Children Come to Christ.

- 1) *Our little ones, whom we bring.*
- 2) *God's little ones, whom we are.*

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup> And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Parents: I don't know whether or not you realize it, but you did a beautiful thing today – and for this I praise God.

I know the choice you had this morning. You could have stayed in bed a little longer, but you didn't. You got up, got dressed and brought your children here. Why? Because you want your children to know their Savior!

But don't stop at merely dropping your children off at Sunday School, come yourself to worship and the new Bible Class we will offer during the Sunday School hour. Why? Because we too are God's children whom he wants to instruct, hold and bless. Let us consider this truth under the theme: **Let the Children Come to Christ.** 1) *Our little ones, whom we bring.* 2) *God's little ones, whom we are.*

Part One: *Our little ones, whom we bring.*

Our sermon text takes place during the final stages of Jesus' earthly ministry before his crucifixion. He was in Judea and, after a run in with some Pharisees on the topic of divorce, He retired to a house where the disciples tried to continue the discussion.

Jesus was at the height of his popularity at this time. Therefore, when parents and grandparents heard that He was in town, they started *bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them.*

Just picture the beautiful scene: Daddies holding their daughters' hands and mommies carrying their infant sons – a little train of families coming to Jesus that he might lay his hand on their children in blessing. This scene is more than just beautiful, it is praiseworthy! The parents did a wonderful thing in seeking Christ's blessing for their children.

Oh that all mothers and fathers of today would take this example to heart and imitate it! All too often parents drive their children to all sorts of clubs and sports; but when it comes to bringing their children to worship? Somehow they lack the time. All too often parents have the money to buy their kids all sorts of gadgets, toys and experiences; but when it comes to spending money for their children's Christian education? Somehow they lack the funds.

Let's be honest: it's not about a lack of funds or time because, as the English proverb goes, “where there's a will, there's a way.” No, the problem is that many parents lack zeal. They have lost the recognition of the importance of Christian education – viewing it from a worldly point of view (as yet another thing I

would need to add to my already busy calendar) instead of what it truly is: bringing our children to Christ to place in his arms in order to receive his blessing of forgiveness, life and salvation! What could be more important or more beautiful than that!

Yes, the train of parents bringing their children to Jesus was a wonderful sight to behold; one that the devil tried hard to prevent; as we read: *but the disciples rebuked them.*

Why did the disciples rebuke these families coming to Christ? We don't know for sure. Perhaps it was because they wanted some alone time with Jesus. Maybe they felt he needed rest. Perhaps they felt that Jesus' ministry was far too important than to deal with "children." Regardless of their reasoning, they did a wicked thing when they berated the parents who brought their children to Jesus!

I am sure that the disciples didn't mean it, but they had become agents of Satan: driving people away from Christ instead of bringing them to him. Can the same thing happen to us? It sure can! I once heard a story of how a group of parishioners asked their pastor to do something about all the crying children in worship. They wanted him to encourage parents to keep them out of the sanctuary during the service. I don't think they realized the danger of their request, but the pastor did. This is why he disregarded their request outright, telling them: "I would rather hear these children crying in worship now than crying in hell later!"

Just like the disciples, we all have preconceived notions of what the kingdom of God should be like and, if some person in our group threatens those preconceived notions, we are tempted to criticize them, instead of turning to Christ and seeing from Scripture whom he wants His kingdom to be like. We might think that we are protecting Christ's honor when, in fact, we are merely protecting our own comfort level.

But *when Jesus saw this, he was indignant.* He called the disciples to himself and told them quite forcefully: "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*"

Even though we can learn a lot from Jesus' rebuke, let us meditate on the obvious: Jesus loves children and wants them to be with him. He knows that all people are born sinful – needing his mercy and grace. Children are no exception to this truth, and this is why Jesus so earnestly desires them to come and receive the forgiveness He won for them.

So, let the little children come to Jesus. And where do they find Jesus? In his Word! Do not hinder them from hearing, seeing and singing about all the wonderful stories about Christ. Having inherited a sinful nature from their parents, children need to hear the Gospel every bit as much as adults. They need to be reassured of His love and forgiveness. Why? So that they might become God's children and heirs of eternal life.

"But," someone might say, "since my child is an infant, it is too young to understand the word. What's the point of bringing them to church or reading the Bible to them now?" Let me respond to that question with a Bible verse – something Paul wrote to a young man named Timothy. He said to him: *from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Did you catch that? Timothy had saving faith in the holy Bible from infancy – that is, before He could even reason or talk! How is that possible? That I don't know – it is a miracle of God! But how this faith came about I can tell you: his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois spoke the Gospel with him from the time He was born – and the Holy Spirit worked through their witness to somehow both awaken and strengthen saving faith in his infant heart. Through their words, prayers and songs they continually brought baby Timothy to Jesus, and Jesus blessed him.

Jesus loves it when we bring our children to him as well. He gives us the means of Holy Baptism (something Lois and Eunice did not have) as a real and tangible way we can present our children to Christ to receive his blessings. And once the Spirit works the miracle of faith in their hearts through this sacrament, God wants us to continually bring our children to Jesus just like Timothy's mother and grandmother did for him by sharing the Scriptures with them at home, bringing them to Sunday School and worship, and by allowing them to have a Christian education at our school in Algoma.

Let us not become agents of Satan by inadvertently hindering our children from hearing the Gospel because we are too busy to take the time to bring them to Christ. Let us, rather, see the great blessing Jesus offers us and our children through the Gospel - ever eager to receive it ourselves.

Part Two: *God's little ones, whom we are.*

Jesus said: *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

What is the kingdom of God? It is Christ's gracious rule in the heart. To be in God's kingdom is the same as being a believer. It means being in a right relationship with God, one in which we are not afraid of Him because our sins have been forgiven in Christ. To be in God's kingdom means that we are God's children by faith – children who love God and want to show our love towards him by living our lives to his glory.

The kingdom of God, eternal salvation with Christ, belongs only to people who receive it like children. What does that mean? How do children receive the kingdom of God as opposed to adults?

Children, in Jesus' time, had no rights or claims to anything. They received everything they had as a gift. To receive the kingdom of God like a child, therefore, is to receive all the blessings Jesus offers us as a gift – and not as something we earn or deserve. It is to approach God the same way a little child approaches its parents: in simple, humble trust. It means that we leave our doubts and skepticism behind - simply listening to Jesus in faith. It means that we will look forward to every opportunity we have to spend time with Jesus, where He embraces and blesses us by the power of his Word.

*"I tell you the truth,"* Jesus says, *"anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."* His point is clear: there is no salvation for those who refuse to humble themselves like little children before Him. Relying on our mature wisdom, understanding and work will get us nowhere except hell. Simple, childlike faith is all that matters. It is the only thing that unites us with Christ in order that we might receive the forgiveness, life and salvation won for us through His cross.

This is why, as we bring our children to Jesus, let us not neglect bringing ourselves, for we too are children of God through faith. Don't let the devil, world and your sinful nature steal you away from the blessings Christ wants to give you. Watch, pray and come to meet Christ in His Word and Sacraments on a regular basis. Then Jesus will lift you too in his arm, hug you, speak tenderly to you and bless you just as He did the children in our text.

Parents, I thank God that you brought your children here today to be blessed by Jesus. Continue to bring them every Sunday, letting nothing hinder them from being blessed by their Savior. Moreover, continue bringing yourself to Jesus, so that you might receive the same blessings your children are receiving – ever growing in faith and love toward God. Amen.