

KEEPING CHILDREN IN THEIR PLACE

Meditation, October 21, 2018

Mark 10:13-16, Ephesians 6:1-4

Christian Education Sunday

LET THE CHILDREN COME

by David Steele

There's nothing as nice as some children
Every family should have one or two

They're such a fine race
When they're kept in their place
Say, the nursery, the park, or the zoo.

In his place the young child is delightful,
Full of fun, a most interesting buddy;
But his yearning for action can cause a distraction,
When he has invaded the study.

The office is no place for children.
They foul up our work with their fun.
So we make it a rule that they must go to school
So their elders can get something done.

Some children came searching for Jesus.
His friends were distressed ... and inclined
To think t'would be terrible to have fresh parable
Suddenly slip from His mind.

So they tried to get rid of the children,
Surely no major disgrace,
Protecting their Master from some great disaster,
By keeping the children in place.

"Let those children come in," Jesus shouted,
And said something frightfully odd.
"They are bearers of grace and their ultimate place
Is right smack in the kingdom of God."

So the place of the child is the kingdom!
That's what He so carefully taught.
So the last time you did
Play some ball with your kid,
You were closer to God than you thought.

On this Christian Education Sunday, I'd like to talk about putting children in their place ... their proper place, their right place ... and about how to KEEP them there. Jesus told His disciples in no uncertain terms just where that proper place is ... it is in His presence, right next to His side. In today's reading, parents were bringing children to Jesus, and the disciples basically rebuked the parents for doing so! In so many words, they said, "*Get these kids out of here; this gathering is for grown-ups only! Don't bother the rabbi with noisy kids while He's teaching!*" Jesus stopped them by responding, and I believe possibly SHOUTING, "*HEY! Let the children come, do not hinder them ... unless you become as one of these, you will not see the kingdom of Heaven.*" I believe at least part of what Jesus is inferring is that from the divine perspective, the divine perspective of the One who is co-equal with the Ancient of Days, ALL of us are children, all of us are kids ... and we all are not only welcomed, but we are all strongly invited, to be in the presence of Jesus along with all the other people of God, young, old and all ages in between! Imagine the disciples pausing, looking at Him with puzzlement, then turning with a shrug of their shoulders and saying, "*Hey, kids, come on up! Time with the Rabbi!*"

In Ephesians 6:4 Paul admonishes, "*Do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" The unmistakable implication is when we don't bring children up in the "training and instruction of the Lord," when we don't raise them "in the presence of Jesus," we cause them to grow up exasperated. We confuse them, we frustrate them, and our neglect can actually hurt them. One of the more sobering statements made by Jesus during His ministry on Earth concerned the raising of children. He said it would be better for a person to have a millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea to drown ... sort of the Galilean version of cement shoes ... rather than cause a child to stumble. That might sound like an extreme sentence to be carried out for contributing to the delinquency of a minor, but Jesus is deadly serious! He is also deadly serious about our contributing to the growth and well being of minors.

Ten years ago I came across a story that took place in a tenement section in Harlem. A somewhat-poorly dressed woman was shuffling along down the sidewalk carrying an old department store bag. A police officer sitting in his patrol car noticed her picking up something from the street. She'd look around, bend over, pick up whatever-this-something-was, place it in her bag, move on a few feet, and do it again. Several times this officer saw her do this: stop, look around, stoop, pick up something and hide it in her bag. Finally, he went up to her and asked, "What are you carrying off in that bag?" The frightened woman did not answer at first. The officer, thinking she may have found something illicit or something valuable, asked a bit more gruffly. "Now, I don't want to have to place you under arrest. What are you carrying off in that bag?" The woman nervously opened her sack and revealed ... a small pile of broken glass. She said, "I just thought I would like to take it out of the way of the children's feet." She was just doing her small part as best she could do to protect the children from getting hurt. Just as a bit of an aside, please note what she *didn't* say. She didn't say, "Look, broken glass. It's a shame that's there. Tsk, tsk. 'They' should do something about that." No. She saw the potential danger, and she just took care of it. She picked it up. She wanted to do her part, whatever it might be, to keep children from getting hurt.

Now, what can we learn from this woman? How do we pick up the "glass"? What can we do, what part can we play, to keep children from getting hurt? How do we protect them from the things that "litter" our contemporary culture that would hurt them, how do we keep them from the many sharp and dangerous "edges" along their ways in life, how do we keep them from getting hurt? Well, one way is by doing all we can to put them and keep them in their proper place: in the presence of Jesus. Paul says we do it by the way we bring them up "in the Lord." We communicate the Christian faith in many ways, the most important of which is the example we set. So much of Christian living is caught, not taught. Children will, for the most part, follow our lead.

We read from Deuteronomy 6 earlier during the installation of our teachers: "Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only God, and you shall love the Lord with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your might. Bind his words to your heart! You shall teach these words diligently to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and your forehead. Write them on your doorposts and your gates." Do you hear how this teaching is to be done? It is not reserved for forty-five minutes a week on Sunday morning, important as those forty-five minutes are. It is an ongoing process of modeling the life of the family of God for and with our children. It is making sure that as our children come and go they are constantly and continually confronted with our conversation about God and His good commandments, so that it may go well for them for years to come. We bring up our children in the training and instruction of the Lord by the lives we live and by the conversations in our homes and opportunities we provide, which includes enabling and encouraging our children to be a part of the Sunday school, **and** it means having our children in worship with us as we place ourselves in the presence of Jesus and make Sunday worship of Him a top priority.

There is an old Ziggy cartoon where Ziggy is sitting in front of the television and hears: "In viewing the following program, parental discretion is advised ... but not really expected." Well, God actually *does* expect parental guidance from us in this area. And not just from the parents! In the family of God, **every one** of us plays a role in the training, every one of us can help "pick up the glass." It doesn't matter whether we are married or single, it doesn't matter whether we are young or old ... by virtue of our promises at baptism, the responsibility of raising the kids of this church belongs to all of us.

Let's do our part to pick up the glass. Let's put and keep all the children of this church ... which includes ALL of us, from the divine perspective ... in their place, their proper place ... ever in the presence of Jesus.

COMMISSIONING OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TEACHERS

(Adapted from The Worshipbook, "Order for the Public Worship of God," pp. 100-101)

*Those appointed to teach will stand before the congregation
as the following Scriptures are read:*

"Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." *(Deuteronomy 6:4-7)*

"Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age." *(Matthew 28:19-20)*

In unison, the congregation shall respond:

"WHAT WE HAVE HEARD AND KNOWN FOR OURSELVES AND WHAT OUR ANCESTORS HAVE TOLD US MUST NOT BE WITHHELD FROM THEIR DESCENDANTS, BUT BE HANDED ON BY US TO THE NEXT GENERATION; THESE IN THEIR TURN WILL TELL THEIR OWN CHILDREN SO THAT THEY, TOO, MAY PUT THEIR CONFIDENCE IN GOD, REMEMBER THE WORKS OF GOD, AND KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD."

The pastor will address the teachers, saying:

"You have been called by our Lord Jesus Christ to a special work and ministry. As teachers of the Word of Truth, you will announce God's good law to each new generation, and tell of Jesus Christ, so others may know Him, love Him, and live His truth in the world."

"Do you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, and through Him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?" **("We do.")**

"Will you study the Scriptures and the confessions of the church, so that with intelligence, imagination and love you may call men and women, boys and girls to faith in Jesus Christ and train them as His disciples?" **("We will.")**

The congregation shall stand, and the pastor will address them, saying:

"Our Lord ordered His church to teach those who are baptized. Do you, the people of the church, promise to prayerfully support and encourage these men and women as they teach the good news of the Gospel, helping their students know all that Christ commands?" **("We do.")**

The congregation and teachers shall join in the following Affirmation:

*(from the **Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38**)*

*(Pastor:) **"What does God require in the fourth commandment?"***

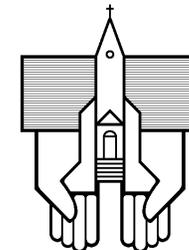
"FIRST, THAT THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BE MAINTAINED, AND THAT I DILIGENTLY ATTEND CHURCH, ESPECIALLY ON THE LORD'S DAY, TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD, TO PARTICIPATE IN THE HOLY SACRAMENTS, TO CALL PUBLICLY UPON THE LORD, AND TO GIVE CHRISTIAN SERVICE TO THOSE IN NEED. SECOND, THAT I CEASE FROM MY EVIL WORKS ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, ALLOW THE LORD TO WORK IN ME THROUGH HIS SPIRIT, AND THUS BEGIN IN THIS LIFE THE ETERNAL SABBATH."

The pastor shall address the teachers, saying:

"And now, by the authority of the session of the Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian, you are now commissioned to teach in the church. Be energetic, be diligent, be honorable, and most of all, be faithful to Christ our Lord and His church as you carry out the work of this ministry!"

The congregation shall pray in unison for the teachers, saying:

"ALMIGHTY GOD: IN EVERY AGE YOU HAVE APPOINTED TEACHERS TO TELL OF YOUR POWER, GOODNESS AND LOVE. WE THANK YOU FOR THESE WHO WILL TEACH OTHERS YOUR WAYS. THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT, GRANT UNTO THEM SPECIAL GIFTS TO DO THEIR SPECIAL WORK. MAY THEY BE FAITHFUL CHANNELS OF YOUR SON OUR LORD, MAY THEY SPEAK HIS TRUTH TO THOSE ENTRUSTED TO THEIR CARE, AND MAY THEY BE EMPOWERED AND EQUIPPED TO LIVE THE LIFE OF FAITH, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, AMEN."



*Lord, you have been
our dwelling place
in all generations.*

Psalm 90:1