

Selected Sermons #9

The Festival Half of the Church Year by E. Schaller

MARK 10:13-16 1ST Sunday after Epiphany

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 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. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus –

We do not pray to idols, and we do not worship graven images. The beautiful statue of Christ that we dedicate today as a new adornment of our altar is not there for such a purpose. Neither an idol nor a graven image, it stands to remind us of the invisible One who is present in our midst as we gather here – and above all it serves to picture to our forgetful hearts, the one reason for his being among us as well as the one purpose which brings us here to the house of God.

For what is the outstanding feature of the statue? You will admire the beauty of the royal robes it wears, for it is the picture of the King of glory. If you look longer, you will also see the wounds and the precious drops of blood, for by these he bought his crown and his kingdom as well as the right to rule. But above all, you will come to enjoy at last the message of the hands that are lifted in constant blessing – for all that is in that King of glory, all his power and all his love, flows forth through those hands upon others.

What is pictured there upon our altar is actually happening – not through the statue, but by the real, invisible Lord who said, “Lo, I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). Where is that blessing of his to fall? Upon whose head does it descend? Oh, let it not be said of us that we do not understand our own picture! May the answer of our Gospel text always stand as the true interpretation of those lifted hands! Consider with me –

Whom is the Lord blessing?

I. Our children, most certainly

II. All of us, if we are like unto them

I. One certain group of people will never leave this house of God without taking with them the Savior’s blessing. They are the children which are bought here to him. Not one child will fail to receive this blessing and

all the wonderful things that go with it is a fact so startling that, if we study it carefully, it must have a profound effect upon our lives. But how is it to be proved that for every child brought here to the Lord, his blessing is a certainty?

The proof is not to be found in any sentimental human theory that children are naturally good and therefore beloved of God, for that is simply not true. To say that Christ loves children because he was once a child himself, or because they are so pure, is to talk nonsense and falsehood both. Children are sinful from birth – and the love of Jesus extends to all both young and old, because he died of all. Jesus does not pick out children as a class of people who have his blessing, while others must seek for it and may fail to receive it. Children are no more entitled to blessings than anyone else. It will not do to read into our Gospel text things it does not say. Jesus did not declare that all children are in the kingdom of God but said, *“Of such is the kingdom of God.”*

Let us note that the children who received the Lord’s blessing were **those children that came to him**. There were thousands of infants and older children living in Canaan, yet it is nowhere said that they all were blessed or were in the Kingdom of God because they were children. The real truth is important enough without adding anything. And what is the real truth revealed by our

Gospel? This, that of the children that were brought to Christ, not a single one went away without his blessing. Although there were many hindrances, **there was not a single failure.**

“But,” you say, “is not that the case with all, adults as well? If they come or are brought to Christ, they will always be blessed.” Study your Scriptures for the answer, for it is not true at all! Remember that rich young ruler: Jesus loved him and wanted to bless him, but the young man went away empty and sorrowful. Think of Judas: he came to Jesus and kissed him – but all he drew out of it was the terrible curse of his conscience.

Compare that with the scene here described. Large numbers of children came to Jesus. They were of all ages; we know that some were tiny infants, for Matthew and Luke tell us this. And what do we read but that *“He took them up in his arms and blessed them”*? Not one was turned away; and we are left to understand that not one missed being blest.

Here, then, is our answer – and may we ponder it well! The statue before us represents the blessing Savior. It tells us that here the King of glory and salvation is present to pour out his riches. Of course, he is present not only here but also in homes where he is worshiped and his

Word is read and taught – also in our Christian school, where he is worshiped and where his Word is read and taught. The statue did not bring him here, and he is present with lifted hands even where there is no picture of him, so long as his Word is taught. And where that is not the case, a whole room full of statues will not mean anything. But where he is truly present, his blessing falls, and it falls without fail upon our children, those that are brought to him, those that come. Let this statue tell you the truth, that if you bring your children here, they cannot and will not go anyway without carrying with them the Savior’s blessing. That the same is true of our parochial school, I have already indicated.

If anyone appreciates the meaning of those outstretched hands, they know what it means to have this blessing (knowing that with it we can go a far way indeed because it is the blessing of the kingdom of heaven) and now sees plainly from the Word of God that **our children will never fail to receive it if we bring them** - it is hard to understand parents who do not want to bring them. If we want our children blessed by Christ, here is the guarantee of a 100% return. Who could ignore that?

One might ask the reason. “Why,” we ask, “is the blessing so certain, so unailing for children?” That, too, is explained in our text. Jesus said, *“Of such is the kingdom of*

God.” Mark that! The world recognizes the importance of children for the adults they will become when it says, “*children are the future of the race.*”

God goes farther; in the Kingdom of God, children are everything! Jesus builds his kingdom with them and of them. He simply tells us that whenever he can get a child. He takes it quickly, because if he wants to build the Kingdom of God, he must have children. They are all he can use. You may offer him kings and presidents and the cleverest inventors and the richest men on earth, but he just shakes his head: “Can’t use them. Where are the children?” And when the children come, he reaches for them until he has every one within reach and blesses them.

We need not look far to discover the true reason for this strange selection. The Kingdom of God, you see, is a gift. It must be received, not worked out. It is just like the blessing of Christ; everything just flows out from the Lord’s hands and falls on us like the gentle dew of heaven. So great, so high are the gifts of God in Christ that the mind and hands of men are helpless to do anything toward them. They just come – and who can better receive them than a child? Humble, simple childhood – how glad it is to be told, to take what it cannot understand, to believe what it cannot see!

Have you never seen a child's eyes light up when you tell him about Jesus? Have you seen the little hands folded in prayer, without fear or doubting? Children won't kiss Jesus with their minds on the money-bag, like Judas. Jesus can tell a child that he on the cross loves him, and the child will not be ashamed to have him as his Savior; he will confess him freely. Now, with such hearts the Lord can build a lovely kingdom. He won't overlook a single one of them. Remember that when you come here and see the statue. Say to yourself, "Today my child by my side is getting rich on that blessing. What about me?"

II. Well, what about us? Is that Lord blessing us? How sad that we cannot give a "Yes" to that without qualification. We can only answer as does our Gospel text. **"Yes, he is blessing us all, if we are like unto our children."** *Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.* The trouble with the grown-ups lies with us, not with the blessing Lord. And what is the trouble?

Why, **we have too many rebukers**, outside and inside us! Here is a perfect example of it in our text – *The disciples rebuked those who brought them.* That means that they scolded the mothers, tried to drive them away by strong words of caution and discouragement. "Take your

children home; he has no time for them; he can't do anything for them anyway; they do not need him."

That is the trouble, my friends, right now. We have such people, too, and we are unfortunate in being able to understand them. If we come to the Lord as sinners, they tell us that he has no time for us, or that he cannot do anything for us. If we come as workers, they tell us that he does not need us. If we come for his blessing, they say, "Phooh! What is a blessing? God helps those who help themselves. Don't look for anything free."

Meanwhile, we have a rebuker also **within ourselves** – our pride and our wisdom and our earthliness. Pride resents being offered something for nothing, as though we were beggars – which we are but hate to admit. Wisdom tells us that reason is against the kingdom which Christ is building – and earthliness blinds us to the beauty of the Lord. What a stumbling-block these rebukers have been to many adults, even when they were brought to Christ!

A certain Nathanael once almost failed of the blessing because he came to Jesus thinking, "I am too smart to believe that anything good can come out of Nazareth." A certain Thomas once came very near missing the Easter blessing because he was too grown-up to believe in the resurrection. The rich young ruler just had too much

money; he lost the blessing. If he had been a child, he would have put his arms about Jesus and laughed at the money.

Look at the statue and ask yourself, **“Is he blessing me?”** Why, then, he says, “I have never had a child come to me that did not get all that I have as his own.” Are you a child? *Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.* Let the problem be turned over to you, then. **Are you humble enough to accept a blessing?** A child is empty, and when he is fed, he takes the food gladly, eagerly – but adults are often satisfied with themselves as they are. Often we say children are always hungry; well, that is the point. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6) – but those who are righteous in themselves will turn away. How can the Lord bless them?

Are you able to appreciate the riches of his blessing? You can appreciate the value of a jewel or of a dollar bill; a child cannot. Therefore a child is much more easily shown what Jesus has in his heavenly treasure, and it will appeal. We can see that adults are so sold on earthly values that when the Lord’s benediction has been pronounced upon them, they can go forth and forget about it immediately when the conversation turns upon the price of cattle.

And if you receive the blessing of Jesus, are you ready to return to him with a free hand? If you tell a child the full truth about Jesus, the child will be likely to want to give Jesus all of his or her love. Love springs up fast in that little heart touched by the love of Jesus.

Are you that way? Certainly, if we sought all this in ourselves, there would be no hope for us, because we cannot make ourselves as little children – but we can become as such. If you look at the statue, it reminds you of God whose powerful love is the mighty fluid that changes us. When he is held before us in his gospel, the Holy Spirit makes us humble. We are shown the treasures of his grace, and we learn to be thankful for them. **Christ makes us little children again, that we may receive the Kingdom.** As we are, it is impossible that we should receive the blessing – but we look to him to make our hearts young and to give us power to believe as little children do.

Lord, bless us, your children, and we shall be blessed!
Amen!

Before thee, God, who knowest all #318

O Jesus, King of glory #139

Invited, Lord, by boundless grace #308