

Enfolding Love

Mark 10:2-16

The Reverend Doctor Michael Newheart

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The title of this sermon is "Enfolding Love," and it is based on Mark 10:2-16, which was read for you just a moment ago. Through Oct 24, I will be preaching on passages from the Gospel of Mark, which was probably the first Gospel written, written around 70, about 40 years after Jesus lived.

In the Gospel of Mark, there are good guys and bad guys. The good guys include Jesus, of course. He is the Messiah, the anointed one, the one in whom the Spirit dwells, therefore proclaiming the kingdom of God and working miracles.

Also among the good guys are the disciples, who leave their nets and their tax tables to follow Jesus. They too proclaim the kingdom and work miracles.

There are also minor characters who are good and faithful. We have these in the children, who are exemplary believers. We will also see blind Bartimaeus, who follows Jesus on the way¹, along with the woman who anoints Jesus for his burial.² They are the good folk in the gospel.

Yet in the Gospel there are also "bad guys," and we see them in our reading today: The Pharisees. Feel free to "boo." They are constantly confronting Jesus. In our passage, they are testing Jesus by asking a question about divorce.

Another set of bad guys are the disciples. You may say, "Hold on! You listed the disciples as good guys, but now you list them as bad. Did you make a mistake?" Mistakes were made, but it is the disciples who are mistaken, because they consistently fail to understand Jesus. Peter wants to keep Jesus from crucifixion,³ James and John want the best seats in the kingdom,⁴ and all the disciples argue about who is the greatest.⁵ And in our passage today, they speak sternly to parents who are bringing their children for Jesus to touch them. Jesus is indignant at the disciples. They just don't get it. They're one taco short of a combination platter. To them, God has given the mystery of the kingdom,⁶ but throughout the gospel they don't understand. Tsk-tsk-tsk.

Jesus said to the disciples, "Let the little children come to me; don't stop 'em, for it's to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." The kingdom belongs to those on the margins, the

¹ Mark 10:46-52

² Mark 11:3-9

³ Mark 8:31-33

⁴ Mark 10:35-40

⁵ Mark 9:33-37

⁶ Mark 4:11

little ones, the unprotected. In the previous chapter, when the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, Jesus took a little child in his arms and said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."⁷ Jesus is pro-child. And he calls for his followers to be so as well. He calls for us to welcome the child in Jesus' name.

My office looks out onto the playground of the First Church Academy for Young Children. I see the joy of the children as they play. I hear their laughter and their glee.

Jesus also says, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." We must receive, accept. Jesus calls us to accept life, not with clenched fists but with open hands. During COVID, those open hands may have to form a fist bump so as not to spread the virus. I have greeted people who have attempted to shake my hand with a fist bump. It is my way of accepting the kingdom as a child.

Receiving the kingdom as a child also means to accept God as king or as sovereign. In this bridge period, God is in control. Can we receive the kingdom like a child, celebrating all that God is doing here at First Church?

It is important to realize that Jesus calls for childlikeness rather than childishness. There is a maturity to childlikeness. I remember an elderly woman in my first interim pastorate back in the early 80s when I was in graduate school. She was named Opal, and she was quite a jewel. Opal had a childlike sense of wisdom, of warmth, and of wonder. Pablo Picasso said, "It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child."⁸ It takes all our lives to grow up into childlikeness.

What does all this have to do with World Communion Sunday? With wonder, with acceptance, with joy, we come to the table with people from all around the globe. We come with young and old, male and female, black and white and all the colors in between, gay and straight. We come to the table with the world. Walt Whitman said, "I contain multitudes."⁹ So does our communion, so does our world, so does our God. And all are blessed. Amen.

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First Church West Hartford
12 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107

⁷ Mark 9:37

⁸ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/62706-it-took-me-four-years-to-paint-like-raphael-but>

⁹ <https://poets.org/poem/song-myself-51>