

Matthew 18:1-6 & 19:13-15

Richard J. Koch

"Let the Children Come"

July 14, 1991

Text: *"Then the children were brought to him..."* (Matt. 19:13)

A lot of people marvel at the story I told in a sermon last year about my wife giving birth to our son Danny in the car. Frankly, that was the easy part. The hard part is raising the little bugger along with his big brother. Commercials tell us the Peace Corps will provide us with "the toughest job you'll ever love." That's a bunch of bunk. The Peace Corps may be tough, but its not the toughest. Parenting is the toughest job in the world and I draw this conclusion from many experiences, not just my own.

From the minute they're born, kids bring the weight of worry and responsibility upon parents' shoulders. For every little disaster and heartache there is laughter and love. Raising children is challenging and fun sort of like the kind of challenge and fun a mountain climber has scaling Mount Everest. Another thing I've noticed about children is my own are really cute and others are not always so cute. (I've heard other parents say the same thing about their kids.) All children have at least one thing in common. They are a living, breathing, dollar sign for doctors of every sort, merchants of every kind, and toy dealers of all shapes and sizes. Kids are expensive, but I will never say they are not worth it.

Raising children is in style again. The little "rug rats" are everywhere filling up day care centers, schools, playgrounds, and diapers. This is why I am preaching about children today. I thought we all needed to be reminded of Jesus' teachings about children and being childlike before all our good little illustrations grow up.

The Gospel story tells us about how the children were brought to him. They did not just appear on their own or happen to be playing in the area and stopped to listen to Jesus. They were brought to him by loving and concerned adults, probably their parents, who wanted Jesus to lay his hands upon them. Concerned and caring parents will lead their children to what is good and right. It is our responsibility to do so. As Christian parents we are responsible to lead our children to the teachings, example, and life of

Jesus. In effect, through the church and by our example, we parents and grandparents are now the ones leading our children to Christ.

But how many of us are fitting ourselves for millstones because we are causing our children to stumble? Look at our lifestyles and our priorities and see if we are not causing our little ones to shed their innocence and put on the ways of the world. On Sunday mornings the god of recreation and sport claims kids of all ages who participate in soccer, baseball, swimming, etc. and we parents are responsible. Church is second or maybe third on the list of priorities if time allows. Families return to church when children are of Sunday School age and leave when they're confirmed. The millstone is getting tighter as we teach our children that church is more a social gathering rather than an important component in building one's faith life.

I once heard a story about an old man who was dying, but very troubled. After awhile, he finally told those around him what was bothering his soul. *"When we were boys at play,"* he said, *"one day at a cross-roads we reversed a sign post so that its arms were pointing in the wrong direction and I've never ceased to wonder how many people were sent in the wrong direction by what we did."* How terrible to be plagued a lifetime by such a seemingly harmless prank. But the illustration is clear. As one noted author puts it, *"The sin of all sins is to teach another to sin."*

Now is the time for us to reverse the road signs and instead of leading our children down the uncertain path of our adult ambitions, maybe we can become more like children in our faith. William Barclay points out, *"The question of the disciples was: 'Who will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' and the very fact they asked that question showed they had no idea at all what the Kingdom of Heaven is. Jesus said, 'Unless you turn.' The very fact he used that way of speaking means He was warning them they were going in completely the wrong direction and unless they made a right-about turn they were going away from the Kingdom of Heaven and not toward it."* Running toward the Kingdom with the unfettered enthusiasm of a child is the direction Jesus wished for his disciples and wishes for us to turn.

When I was a boy you could hardly hold me back from such exciting adventures as Christmas morning, Fourth of July fireworks, riding in a motor boat, vacations from school, etc. On those

particularly special days it seemed to me all the adults in the world, who had anything to do with the excitement at hand, were moving in slow motion. On Christmas mornings we had to eat a nice big breakfast and wash all the dishes before we could open presents. I thought I'd bust waiting for this interminable process to be completed and often wondered if I would grow old and die while waiting for my dad to dry the dishes. It is exactly this kind of impatient excitement and wonder we are expected to possess relevant to God's Kingdom. We ought to want to be experiencing the Kingdom right now!

Beyond the enthusiasm of a child, it is hoped we will live in childlike humility, dependence, and trust in God. George A. Buttrick reminds us, *"A child is dependent and trusting--at least until adult unworthiness breaks the trust. A child is friendly and unconscious of rank or race: a king's child will play with the ragman's child, until adult prejudice spoils the friendship. A child is candid, as witness the Hans Christian Andersen story of the emperors new clothes: the adults admired them, fulfilling the 'conventions,' until a little child said, 'But he has nothing on!' A child lives in a constant wonder, makes toys out of trash, and finds life a high romance...Thus a child expects great things of life, and finds them. The faith that Jesus prized is instinct in a child."*

Our calling is to be on the path Jesus implored his disciples to turn toward. A path which gives one a childlike excitement for the Kingdom of God. Unless we turn and become like children, then we will not understand what God has in mind for us and our lives. When Jesus blessed the little children he said, *"...of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."* Are we a part of God's plan or are we trapped in an overly adult world trying to get our children and others to become like us as we develop our earthly kingdoms. Summertime provides many opportunities for us to reflect on our lives and decide whether or not we will follow God's plan or our own plan for our existence. Often times, our own dreams include a lot of hard work and anxiety to accomplish grandiose schemes which may fail us. We may hope for a big promotion, but it may take us away from our family. We may wish for loads of money and then borrow all the unseen troubles of wealth. Maybe all we want or even need is permission to lead a simple life with expectations within the range of our own gifts and talents. God can give us such permission. I am not asking anyone here to consider laziness, for even in our childlike innocence God will have plenty for us to do. The question is what are

we striving for. Are we striving for a life filled with false fronts and grand expectations, or are we looking for the fulfilling happiness offered by God? Being a child of God does not mean lacking maturity. It means gaining the reality in which one's life ought to be lived. Being a child of God usually means one has found the spiritual peace we so dearly seek to satisfy our anxious lives.

Will Allen Dromgoole wrote a poem called "The Bridge Builder" and I share his words with you.

*An old man traveling a lone highway,
Came at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream held no fears for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side,
And builded a bridge to span the tide.*

*"Old man," cried a fellow pilgrim near,
"You're wasting your time in building here.
Your journey will end with the closing day;
You never again will pass this way.
You have crossed the chasm deep and wide,
Why build you this bridge at even-tide?"*

*The builder lifted his old gray head:
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This stream which has been as naught to me,
To that fair haired youth may pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim-
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him."*

So our adventure be, as children of God, in service of him and love for others; in that we not set up stumbling blocks for any of God's children, but add to the ease of their journey. Difficult as it is to raise our own children, imagine the task God has in turning us away from ourselves and becoming enthusiastically childlike for his sake. Today, let us help God in that task by bending our wills to fall in line with him. Then may we find the peace and satisfaction God created for us to dwell in while here on earth. Amen.