

Luke 18: 15-30 Let The Little Children Come To Me

Today's gospel falls into two sections. In the first Jesus tells his disciples that the Kingdom of heaven belongs to those who come as children. In the second part we are told that it will be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven. We are told we must divest ourselves of riches. At first glance these are disparate themes but on closer inspection and viewed as metaphor perhaps they are part of an overarching theme. We are told to come to God with innocence unencumbered with the ideas of sophistication, and without attachment to wealth and the false security that it offers. Come in simplicity is the message. Let nothing hinder your approach.

Everything about our culture suggests the opposite is true. What we wear, where we go, what we eat, who we associate with, the number of people who like us on Facebook and so it goes. We need to remember that power comes in many forms. Money is one, but intellectual ability and skills are also valued as a sense of security and control. How fickle we can be.

How could little children become a symbol of the life that will bring fulfillment and closeness to God? I've worked extensively with children as a teacher of 40 years. I am not idealizing childhood a state of pure innocence. That would be a mistake. But there are qualities in children that show us the way to God.

Children are capable of transcendence. In other words, their focus can be total and intense, but it is often brief. I think it is the quality of intense focus that we are encouraged to embrace. Jesus tells his disciples that they must not stop parents from bringing their children to him.

I am going to digress here to make some comment on who and how some are prevented from coming to Jesus. Baptism is one way. There are times and places when some clerics have held a hard-line

position where only those who regularly attend church are suitable candidates for Baptism. While I find that this is a desirable situation, I don't believe it should be a reason for exclusion and I turn to my own family for an example. My grandmother did not attend church. I don't know anything about her belief status. What I do know is that she took my mother to the church for Baptism. She did that out of the belief that this was the correct thing to do. For this reason, my mother is adamant that all children who are brought to the church with the request for baptism should be embraced. My mother is a devout woman whose faith has been the mainstay of her life. Without her faith, I don't know how God would have found me. Though I have no doubt that somehow it would have happened.

How else might the church prevent people coming to God? Ordination is another way. I am going to call on a personal example again. I road to ordination was according to my feeling tortured. At one point I was told to "go away" because my call was unstable. I had cried in my interview with an Examining Chaplain. I was talking about a lad at my school that had become a paraplegic because of a Saturday morning football game. I was told that my call was "unstable". Unstable I replied "fine, I will go away, but should I be asked at a later date to reflect on this situation I will cry again".

I let go of any possibility that I might be ordained. I was eventually contacted by the diocese and asked when I would be coming back to a selection conference. Why would I do that was my reply. I then unpacked what had happened at an earlier time. After a meeting with a bishop, I decided to give-over and to offer myself and here I am today. As I reflect on these events, I believe that God's way will win through even if it happens in a roundabout way.

I return to Jesus' statement 'suffer the children to come unto me', and my encouragement you to think about the metaphor of childlikeness the unencumbered sophistication. Enthusiasm and abandon jump out at me. Think of the sheer joy of the embrace with

children and grandchildren. You see metaphor is probably the best way for us to embrace the mystery of the love that is at the heart of God's love for us. We are called to serve not out of a position of power but of powerlessness. We are all called to enter into solidarity with others no matter what situation they find themselves in. In the words of Henry Nouwen not when they have it all together but where they are in pain, not in control, but where they are trembling and insecure not where they are self-assured by but where they dare to doubt and ask questions.¹ I think we should allow these parts of our own journey to be revealed to others.

"As followers of Christ we are sent into the world naked, vulnerable and weak." When we know this is the case, we can reach out to others in the same place. We should never approach ministry from a point of superiority. If any of us was to see ourself as powerful then we would be open to manipulating others. Our true challenge is to make our service to others an **undivided service to God**.

Our real task on this spiritual journey is to believe that our God is a God who came in unspectacular form as a servant. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey and was killed as a common criminal. Perhaps the metaphor of child-like belief is helpful here. Children are reliant upon others for care. Our care comes from the one who loves us fully. When we know this, we don't have to be praised and admired by others. It is Christ who leads us forward.

So what does our gospel call us to? Unincumbered child-like submission. We are told that money and all the trappings of power that may come with it are to be sold and given to the poor in order to have treasure in heaven.

¹ Nouwen, H. *The Selfless Way Of Christ*. p 63

Reference

Nouwen, H. *The Selfless Way of Christ* Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York 2007