

St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora

Proper 11 – 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time with Baptism

Sunday 23/07/2023

Readings: Genesis 28 10-19a / P's 139 1-11, 23-24 / Romans 8 12-25 /

Mark 10 13–16

(Readings are from New International Version)

Sermon Theme: *Children at heart all seeking.*

By Rev'd Stephen Monsieigneur

Genesis 28 10-19a

[28]¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. ¹¹ When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. ¹² He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

¹⁸ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Psalms 139 1-11, 23-24

- ¹ You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
- ² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Romans 8 12-25

[8] ¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba*, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Present Suffering and Future Glory

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Mark 10 13–16

[10] ¹³ Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." ¹⁶ And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

SERMON

Today's passage of Jesus blessing children appears in all three synoptic gospels -Matthew (18:1-5), Mark (10: 13-16) and Luke (18: 15-17). While children are the focus of these passages, did you notice that they are the only people in the story that do and say nothing for themselves.

They are being brought by their parents, blocked by the disciples, called, and welcomed by Jesus. They are simply obedient and humble participants.

How often is the time, place, mode of transport, education, even time for the essential activities of life for children left for them to determine? How often do we as adults stress about those very things? I suspect most of you would say 'often'. This is the point that Jesus is wanting us to notice.

The parents and the disciples have their reasons for doing and saying what they did, but Jesus by rebuking the disciples by responding to the hope of the crowd tells us that whatever our situation we should be like them, the children.

Jesus is not suggesting we discard our responsibilities as adults but that we ensure that in being adults we do not forget to trust, to be humble and inviting, curious and excited to know Jesus and what following him means.

But let's be honest, life is hard. We face demands from all quarters and well simply spending time in prayer, time to get to invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts and lives can seem like just another demand on us.

Shortly I am going to baptise Matilda Grace into our family of faith. While she is already loved by God, her family and Godparents have brought her here today to promise - along with all of us here - to God that they will do all in their power to see that she grows to know Jesus. Raising a person from birth to independence is no easy task. Emotionally it is a rollercoaster with the countless highs and lows that are part of the journey.

It can be full of unimaginable reward, but also just as unimaginable pain. It is not a journey we are equipped to do alone but with the demands of life there can be times when we might feel that is exactly what is happening, and we can become disillusioned.

I regard today's passage from Mark as an indication by the kind and tender disposition of Jesus to take notice of little children, not only as an adult caring to encourage the child to apply themselves to Christ when they are very young, but also myself as a grown person regarded as mature, capable and independent to be conscious of my inner fears, of weakness and childishness, of being, through manifold infirmities, helpless and useless, of being like a little child.

In verse 13 The parents are bringing the 'little children to Jesus in order that he might touch (meaning bless) them, there is no indication for a need of healing of bodily ailment. Also, the fact they are referred to as children implies a societal view that they are too young for formal or academic teaching. It appears that the concern was for the spiritual wellbeing of the children. This is why we seek baptism for the young. We hold a belief that Christ's blessing can do what no earthly teaching or experience can. The sacrament of baptism the water, signing of the

cross and candle is the outward witness of the inward grace only possible in the bidirectional sharing of self with God and accepting Gods eternal grace upon us.

The stern discouragement delivered by the disciple certain in their belief that they knew the mind of their teacher, is a reminder that we are never fully aware of what another experiences. They possibly could not have more wrong in their presumption. In fact such action has the potential to destroy any opportunity for the child to know Jesus and grow in faith.

As we along with Matilda's Godparents and family make a series of promises we are especially reminded of the danger in assuming we know what is. We are reminded of the importance little children that Christ will own and bless them. We are being reminded that we too must receive the kingdom of God as little children (Mk 10:15); that is, we must stand affected to Christ and his grace as little children do to their parents and teachers. We must be *inquisitive* for children, must learn as children, and in learning must come to *believe*.

The mind of a child is blank paper, and we all have the opportunity to write on it. In doing so we should trust our own self to the ultimate divine guardian. We should go where the Father wills, trusting in his love, blessing, and wisdom. Jesus said that without this attitude it is impossible to receive the kingdom. We cannot decide who will enter the kingdom. We cannot decide what will happen in the kingdom. We are not in charge. God is. We are to accept Christ's rule as king, obey the laws of the kingdom and honor our fellow citizens. Like children, we must humbly accept our place and do our best to be truthfull to God, ourselves, and each other.

Jesus received the children, and gave them what was desired (Mk 10:16); *He took them up in his arms*, in token of his affectionate concern for them; *put his hands upon them*, as was desired, and *blessed them* with the spiritual blessings he came to give.

It is true, we do not read that he baptized these children, baptism was not fully settled as the door of admission into the church until after Christ's resurrection; but he asserted their visible church-membership, and by another sign bestowed those blessings upon them, which are now appointed to be conveyed and conferred by baptism, the seal of the promise, which is to us and to our children. Amen.