

Bring the Children Week 3

Bring Someone! Because Someone Brought You

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

Mark chapter ten, verses 13 through 16. People were bringing children to Jesus so that he would bless them. But the disciples scolded them. When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said to them, allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them, because God's kingdom belongs to people like these children. I assure you that whoever doesn't welcome God's kingdom like a child will never enter it.

Then he hugged the children and blessed them. Did you catch that? Because I have missed this so many times reading this passage. But there it is, right there in verse 14, it says that when Jesus saw the disciples shooing the kids away, he grew angry. Now, I often think that, you know, the only time Jesus was angry was when he was in the temple and he overturned the tables.

But here it is, right here in this passage, Jesus grew angry. That's a powerful moment for for Jesus. And he grew angry because the disciples were trying to keep the children away from him. And he wasn't just mildly frustrated or kind of annoyed. He was mad that the young ones were being pushed aside. So that's something we need to pay attention to.

Jesus is making a pretty big statement here about the kingdom of God. And who is worthy to come to the kingdom of God now, children, back then, they were pretty low in the social order, right? They didn't have much in society. They weren't seen as important, especially if you were a girl child. So when Jesus welcomed them, it was kind of shocking for the disciples.

The disciples were like, hey, you know, hey parents, you know, take your kids away. Don't bother Jesus with the kids probably thinking they were doing the right thing because Jesus probably had more important people to talk to, but Jesus stops them and says, nope, let them come to me so he doesn't flip the tables, but he flips the whole idea about who matters.

It's not just children that he's talking about either. He's making a bigger point that we see repeated in other stories of Scripture over and over again about who the Kingdom is, for the kingdom is for anyone that the world tends to ignore or push aside. That includes people today who feel like they don't measure up, or that they don't have a seat at the table.

Jesus is saying, you belong here too. The questions that young people might have, they matter. The opinions that children have matter. And when they are questioning and

searching for their faith and they're searching for faith and truth in a world right now, in a world that is complicated and a world that wants them to grow up way too fast.

Last Sunday, we sang the song How Great Thou Art in worship, and it was the perfect unplanned set up for this sermon. Today. Now I sat next to youth in both services and their comments to me were pure gold. For this sermon in the first service, one of them like leaned over and is kind of hesitant. But she said, I mean, I like this song, but it's a little long.

And I leaned over, and I said, yeah, but the old people love it. Second service, different youth, same song. They leaned over and said, "I've never heard this song before." And I said, yeah, but the old people have, and they really love it. And then they looked at me and they said, well, you know it really well. So basically, I got called old twice in one morning.

And it's true. I do love that song and I am old and so if you grew up in the church, or even if you've been to a few funerals in your life, you probably know the song How Great Thou Art. You feel it. You know it. People were singing it out last weekend. It's sacred. It's a sacred song to a lot of us.

Every once in a while, someone will ask, why don't we sing more hymns? And honestly, it's not something I hear at horizons very often at all, but I did hear a few people last week say, I really loved singing that, that song, and I totally get it. Because first, some hymns are meaningful and they're sacred. They carry memories.

They connect us to tradition and to the people in the moments that we love. So for some people, it's a favorite. It's sacred, its tradition, and for others it's just a really long song with thee and thou in it. Here's the thing. I like hymns many of us do in this room if you grew up in church.

I also know this every generation needs to be invited in and it might take a service to do that. Now, the youth are probably thinking of the TikTok challenge. But here's what search is. Liz Troyer, our preschool coordinator, posted this picture. It says, I believe that every person made between 1975 and 1985 came with a half open roll of these covered in purse dirt.

Right? So, so Liz posted this picture and then she said that it brought back memories. Sitting with her grandpa and grandma at church, and Grandma Grammie always having those in her purse and it's a sweet reminder that every generation carries different memories of church. And if we want to keep growing, we've got to pay attention to who's in the room now and who we want to have in our church for the sake of the future of the church.

According to Pew Research, the median age in U.S churches is 57 at horizons. The average is 36 and the median is just 28. Now I, I did the math on. I pulled from our database just the members and the children in their households. I, I didn't count, all of the awesome people who, attend and but haven't officially joined but are totally part of the church just because it's easy.

So that's the data that I used. So 28 verses 57. So what does that mean? Well, it means, first of all, that you are all doing something right. Creating a place where young people feel seen and valued and invited in. And not all churches do that. Many churches are right there with the disciples. They're shooing away the children.

They're telling them that they're not valued because they don't understand or care about the traditions of the past. There is an obvious focus here at Horizons on Children and Families. So that does that mean that we ignore or the older generations or people without children? Does it mean that we are now banning hymns and hard candy? No, of course not.

In fact, we've just launched a new Discipleship Impact team, and that team is hard at work creating opportunities for adults. And you're going to be hearing more about this in the next sermon series. But I am really excited about expanding opportunities for adults to grow and connect and serve. We care about all generations, but we really have to think deeply about how we invite the next generation to be a part of something here, something different from the world, something that that can change their lives forever.

We have to find the service of this generation. Our mission here at Horizons is horizons is a community where we mature as disciples and lead all to Jesus for the transformation of the world from one generation to the next. And one thing I love about this mission statement is that it doesn't say from, two four.

It doesn't say for the next generation. It says from one generation to the next. And that means we all have a responsibility, that it's our mission to teach others that are younger than us, younger in age, and maybe even younger, just spiritually. And we do that first by having a child like spirit, because Jesus says, if we want to be a part of God's kingdom, we have to be like the children.

Jesus says, God's kingdom belongs to people like those children. And then he says, whoever doesn't welcome God's kingdom like a child will never enter it. Now, one of the best parts of our VBS Summer kids camp is the adult participation. We have so many high schoolers and college age kids and young adults and people much, much older than that who sing and dance and, praise God and play games and have fun during the week of VBS.

The child like spirit is alive and well here, especially during this week. So last week our volunteers all gathered together. We have this volunteer rally the week before VBS starts.

And I had the chance at the rally to introduce the Bible points. And the Bible points are this call and response thing, and it helps everybody to get involved.

I told the volunteers that it was important for them to learn it, because it's important for them to participate and be able to recite them. But also because these are simple truths that sometimes as adults we forget. Because sometimes as adults we overcomplicate things. But instead we should have a child like spirit. So here are some of the the Bible points that the children will be learning this week.

And I invite you to participate. If you want to do the actions, it's this so we can trust Jesus. So that's your part. So when we wonder, we can trust Jesus, when we feel powerless. We can trust Jesus us when we need hope. We can trust Jesus. Simple, powerful truths about Jesus. That's the kind of faith that Jesus is looking for.

That's the kind of faith he's talking about when he says that we should have a child like a spirit, in order to receive the kingdom. When we receive the gift, we receive it like a child. We don't all over complicate it, but we are curious about it. Now, another part of this year's, volunteer rally that we had last week, the VBS leadership team, they incorporated this new training called the Open Table.

We want VBS to be a great experience for all kids and that means that recognizing that all, all kids are not the same. It's super important for us to create a space where kids feel safe, where they can be themselves, where they can play, where they can ask big or small questions about life and faith. Jesus actually has a couple big messages for us in this passage.

First one, everyone belongs. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus keeps inviting people in that others tried to leave out women and children and people who were poor and sick and oppressed or just different. He constantly breaks down barriers and expands the circle. We are supposed to do that to second thing Jesus is teaching us in this passage again is that we are called to have a child like spirit.

This means joy and wonder and openness and probably a little silliness and goofiness to when we talk about our inclusive playground. That's part of our beyond campaign. It's not just about cool equipment. It's about making a statement to our community that says you belong. You belong here at horizons. You belong with Jesus and play. It matters. It matters in Jesus.

Jesus reminds us about the joy and the wonder that we are supposed to have about life. And if we're honest, our world could use a little bit more of that kind of hope. How we treat and reach the next generation reflects how we see Jesus. Now here's an example for you. Imagine your family is known for this generation's old famous apple pie recipe.

And your grandma made it every Thanksgiving, and your mom made it. And then now it's your turn. But your kids, your kids are like, that's too sweet. Or that takes way too much time. Why don't you just go to the store and buy an apple pie? Now, you could say to your children, this is the pie we've always had.

You're going to like it and eat it. And if you do that, that generation's old recipe will probably die with you. Or you could invite them in. You could teach them the heart of the recipe. You could let them try adding cinnamon and or, googling a recipe for a crumb topping. The core stage stays the same. You still have apples and sugar and love, but, but, but the experience becomes their experience now and then.

They will be more likely to pass that message on down to the next generation. Church is like that pie. Some of us will hear how great thou art and it brings tears to our eyes. But for others, especially those who are younger or newer to the church, it's not sacred to them. Yet, and it may never be sacred to them.

But the new song, the brand new song that they just, the our high school youth sang last week in Colorado on their service camp trip. That song. That song is going to mean something to them because that is where they experienced Jesus. So rather than scolding their questions or suggestions as the as the disciples did, you know, trying to shoe them away, we have to invite them in.

We have to share the stories behind the songs that we love, right? We have to share the heart of why it means so much to us. But then we make room for their music and their language and their traditions and their connection to God. So last week we talked about having an answer to someone, you know, if we invited somebody in and say, hey, come and see what this church is all about.

Come and see what Jesus is all about. And what if they said to us, like, why would I want anything to do with Jesus? Why would I want anything to do with the church? Well, our kids are asking that question too, and that's an even bigger challenge for us. What is our answer for our kids saying, why would I come to church?

Why would I want anything to do with Jesus? Because what they are seeing now from from many churches and many Christians, is that Christians are and are speaking tradition, but they're forgetting to simply love their neighbor. Now parents, you set the example for your kids. Your voice and your actions. They matter more than you realize. Is church important to you?

Is Jesus important to you? And do your kids know that? And not just because you show up on Sundays, but because of the way that you live your life and love the rest of the week?

Now for for us without young children, or maybe you don't have children at all. Like we still are part of the mission. We are still part of inviting the next generation in.

And if we're honest, the world is really, really hard to navigate right now. So even if we build the most inclusive and welcoming systems, even if we do our best to live out God's justice, our kids are still facing big, big questions, deep fears, and constant noise from the world. So our kids need something steady. They need something to trust.

They need real hope that they can't find in the world. And that doesn't come from perfect behavior or fancy theology. It comes from watching us. Live a life that's shaped by Jesus. They're watching us to see what matters most to us. They're watching us to see how we treat others. They are watching us to see how we respond when things get hard.

And that's a good thing, because it means that we have the chance to give them something better than. Well, that's just the way it's always been. We can give them the heart of the faith, a life that's filled with love and joy and purpose. Because when Jesus said, let the children come to me, he wasn't just talking about kids.

On coming showing up for VBS. He was talking about us opening, opening up our lives, opening up our churches and our hearts so that the next generation could also welcome Jesus into their life. The mission of Jesus was never preserve tradition at all cost. The mission of Jesus has always been make, go and make disciples of all nations, and that includes the kids who are sitting next to us, the kids down in the DC hall, our neighbor, our neighbors kids because they're watching us and they're asking, is it really worth it?

And let's make our answer. Yes, it is. And we make our answer. Yes it is with how we love. So let's show them that Jesus is worth it. Let's pray. Gracious God, thank you so much for today and for this chance for us to gather and worship. We're so thankful for the volunteers who are down in our our Discovery Zone hallway with our children and our youth.

We pray for for the children and youth who are down there who are, feeling welcomed into the space just as they are. We pray, and we are so grateful that the volunteers and the staff make make it a place where they are welcomed and accepted, and that they can discover and ask big questions about Jesus. Because it's sometimes as adults, we make it so complicated.

But Jesus, you've asked us to to look at the children and to love like they love, and to have the kind of joy that they have. And then you say, when we do that, that we will have an experience. The kingdom of God. God, this world is broken. This world is, is hard and difficult to navigate. But, God, you have made a way.

You you've sent your son Jesus to to be example in this world. And we have a mission to follow him. So help us to do the hard things, to live our life with love and the kind of acceptance that Jesus would want us to live. And help us to invite the next generation in. And we say all of this in Jesus's name. Amen.