

## **HOMILY 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021 - Trinity 18**

**By Revd Andy Jones**

### **Jesus blesses the children (Mark 10: 13-16)**

When was the last time as a grown up (I say this tentatively) you last thought and acted in a childlike way? I was reminded when I read this passage, of an incident last week when I looked out of the vicarage kitchen window to see Harry aged 5, Nanna aged 67 and Gramps aged 70 jumping up and down on the trampoline in the garden. They were running around the netted enclosure pretending to be cars. I was there smiling at this lovely picture and at Harry's joy that his grandparents were sharing that particular moment with him. All of sudden I snapped back to the reality and my years of social work training came flooding back. I was going to the theatre in half an hour with Mrs Jones and there I was entrusting my son to two grown adults who thought it was worth the risk to exceed the manufacturer's maximum weight recommendations on a child's trampoline!

Paintings will often depict Jesus with children throughout his ministry. We have so many references of Jesus advocating for children which is unusual when we think that in Jesus's time children had no rights or social status. These images also lead us to think about the special relationship that Jesus had with the children around him. They trust implicitly and without judgment in a very innocent way. In this passage I think that Jesus is telling us adults that these are the qualities that we should strive for. He does in fact say "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Another interpretation of this could be that Jesus is telling us that as his followers we should seek to be open to being powerless as opposed to seeking power surrendering ourselves to the will of God. This would be in line with loving our neighbours as ourselves; we are not seeing that anyone is better than anyone else, God holds us all in equal regard with the unique gifts that he has given us.

Are our discussions here flawed? Children can be very quizzical by nature, I can never get something past Harry without it being followed by a quiz; why is that and how does that work? I often have to admit that I don't know the answers to many of the questions and just concede with "I'm sorry, dad doesn't know."

Maybe this is the Eureka moment! Why should we not ask questions about our faith? Asking questions prompts us to dig a little deeper into our faith to

further our understanding. The disciples questioned Jesus all the time and he would explain things patiently to them like a parent to a child. I know that I certainly wrestle with passages of the bible and their meaning. The wonderful thing about the bible is that it speaks to us all in different ways dependent on where we are in our lives. Like a child in this passage we should have innocence to trust the answer, but there is nothing to stop us asking questions.

Harry may doubt what I say, he may not understand what I say or why I'm saying he shouldn't leave his Lego on the floor so I don't step on it in the early hours of the morning, but he does (eventually) listen. My love for him is no less because he doubts my logic sometimes and he knows that I will love and care for him come what may. It is fine for us to doubt and question our faith as the Lord will be here to help us and listen to our doubts, as we wrestle with scripture. Scepticism is a good quality. When we think of children we tell them that they should always question strange situations or strangers that they don't know. In the same way, having blind faith has its drawbacks. Christian faith enables and encourages our childlike questions and explorations and nurtures the deepening of our faith and understanding.

My final point is around the warning that I feel Jesus is giving in this passage. The disciples speak sternly to the children and the parents trying to prevent them from having access to him. They had travelled everywhere with Jesus, witnessing his wonders and hearing his teachings. Were they protecting him, not wanting him to feel overwhelmed? Or were they reluctant to share Jesus thinking that they were the only ones who could be near him, creating a physical barrier between Jesus and the parents and children. Almost setting themselves aside from them. When Jesus sees their refereeing he rebukes the disciples by saying that the little children should be able to come to be near him. There is another lesson here for us as Christians; we should not act as the disciples, stopping other people from coming to God. Our ministry should be about encouraging all the children of God to approach him. His love, grace and mercy is plentiful and boundless, there is enough for all those who will step forward.

So let us be open and trust in the Lord. Let us not be afraid to question and explore but to let everybody know that we are all welcome at his side.

Amen