

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 15th March 2009

Good News – for children Matt 19:13 -15



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

You may know what its like! It is a long and exhausting day. You're shattered! All you want to do is put your feet up, a moment of peace perhaps a glass of wine! Then suddenly the sound of children's voices! Wonder what your reaction would be! The Disciples must have inwardly groaned! Having discussed the complexities of the Jewish divorce laws with the Pharisees, trying to grasp their reinterpretation by Jesus (18:1-11), having been exhausted from travelling from Galilee to Judea (19:1) and having managed the vast crowds that were following Jesus (18:2) when at the end of the day people brought children to Jesus the disciples rebuked them! No wonder you might say! But as a result Jesus blue his top! read Mark 10:14 ! The word Mark uses of Jesus is 'indignant' translated as 'angry' in the Good News Bible and 'pained' in the Amplified. William Lane in his interpretation comments that there is a suggestion of irritation and impatience from Jesus. The result was that Jesus placed his hands on the children took them in his arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16) - Good News for children of the Trans Jordan 2,000 years ago but is it still Good News for children today?

Two weeks ago when considering Good News for those who have wandered off we learnt that of the 51,000 that have stopped attending Church in the last seven years 19,000 were children. Of those children that stay only 25% stay on to adult membership. The present reality is that the church today is almost totally failing to reach the vast majority of children with even a glimmer of the gospel and that as soon as adolescence kicks in those that do come to church often loose interest. Listen to these comments from children about church: " *what I like about Church is when it is finished and its time to chat to everyone,*" " *I don't like going to church because the Vicar doesn't speak so we understand it ..but it doesn't mean I don't believe in God!*" " *I looked round the Church today...why does everyone look so sad! Why can't we have time to get to know each other!*"

There are many reasons why we should make Welcoming Children a Priority not least because if we don't there will be no church in the future! But let's focus on three reasons that Matthew gives us:

- 1. We should welcome children... because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them** - Read 19:14
All that God has in store, all his plans and purposes for all creation, all his love- his Kingdom belongs to children. They are included from the start. They are welcome in His kingdom...it begins with them!
- 2. We should welcome children ...because when we welcome children we welcome Jesus** – Read 18:15
In the context of discussing who is the greatest (18:1-5) Jesus says "whoever welcomes a little child...in my name welcomes me." Michael Green says " *Children matter. They mattered to Jesus. They matter in any congregation. The services should be arranged with their needs in view. They need to be befriended, understood and taught. The way we behave to children is one of the indicators of the way we behave to Jesus. That is quite a thought!*"
- 3. We should welcome children...because we need to learn from them** – Read 18:2
Unless we change and become like little children we will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. We need to be more trusting, dependant, modest, innocent, playful, helpless, honest and transparent, pure in heart, humble, simple, small!

The future of the Church is inextricably bound to our welcome and Inclusion of children. Children must be at the vey heart of the church. Children thrive on colour, fun, joy and laughter, pictures and drama, awe and wonder, quiet and loud, movement and music and over and above these the sense of being unconditionally loved and accepted. Our vision here at St Paul's is coloured by the text from Psalm 145 "for this generation and the next." As we seek to renew and express the vision of our Church lets take the opportunity to examine afresh what this will mean both for each one of us and for our whole Church Family.



Witness: questions to discuss

Guidance: Before discussion read the Bible passage, ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Consider one or two questions below – don't feel you have to use them all! Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer and ministry.

1. Read 19:13-15 Imagine you were the disciples . Would you have responded in a similar way? How would you have felt at Jesus' reaction to you? How do you feel when parents bring noisy children into church?
2. Read and reflect together on these comments from children about church: " *what I like about Church is when it is finished and its time to chat to everyone,*" " *I don't like going to church because the Vicar doesn't speak so we understand it ..but it doesn't mean I don't believe in God!*" " *I looked round the Church today...why does everyone look so sad! Why can't we have time to get to know each other!*" What implications do your reflections have for us as we seek God's guidance for the future life of our church?
3. When we don't welcome children are we rejecting Jesus! What is your reaction to this?
4. What is your response to Michael Green's comment: " *Children matter. They mattered to Jesus. They matter in any congregation. The services should be arranged with their needs in view. They need to be befriended, understood and taught. The way we behave to children is one of the indicators of the way we behave to Jesus. That is quite a thought!*"
5. What do you need to change in order to become like a little child?
6. What do we need to change at St Paul's in order to welcome children?