

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups. 24<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2006

## Keys to the Kingdom – 'The Kingdom welcomes children'

### Mark 9:33 – 50



#### Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

##### OUR VISION:

*To celebrate young people of all ages as positive contributors to our community. To support them as they face challenges, fulfill their potential and enjoy life to the full; offering the best possible chance to encounter Christ and be inspired to a life changing, vibrant faith.*

**MARK 9: 33- 50** Jesus turns upside down the disciples' view of what it means to be great in the Kingdom of God. In addition he changes their view of children and the absolute importance of children in the kingdom of God.

**GREATNESS** *"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."*

In these few words Jesus redefines what it means to be great in the kingdom. The idea of greatness is turned upside down in a very unexpected way for the disciples when Jesus takes a little child in his arms, and he says to them, *"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."*

Brennan Manning in his book 'The Ragamuffin Gospel' writes: "It's important to remember the Jewish attitude toward children in first century Palestine if we are to grasp the full force of Jesus teaching here...Children in that society had no status at all – they did not count. The child was regarded with scorn." Jesus has turned their world upside down and presented an alternative they weren't expecting. The child is as valued and as valuable to him as they are. In this scene that Mark paints, Jesus is teaching in the midst of children; he is modeling for them the attitude that they, and we, are to have.

##### THE VALUE OF CHILDREN IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD:

Jesus brings home with force how important children are in the kingdom of God, when he goes on to say: <sup>41</sup>*I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.* <sup>42</sup>*And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck."* He calls us to an attitude of humility towards each other and he starts with a group that as we have already seen were very much considered second class in Jewish society....he uses children as a key to an understanding of the kingdom. Offering a cup of water to a thirsty child is a model of unselfish service. Jesus teaches us that how much we love God can be measured by how we treat others and he notices every good deed we do as if he was the one receiving it.

In verse 42 the caution against harming little ones in the faith applies both to what we do individually as parents, teachers, aunts, uncles, and grandparents *and* in how we model our faith. For the soil of our fellowship and faith to be genuinely welcoming, we need to ensure that our behaviour, rather than our words, illustrates that we truly believe that children are our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is not about putting children on a pedestal, but rather removing the pedestal that we have put ourselves on.

#### Witness: Questions to discuss



1. Do we think of children as being 'great?' Do we value them in the way Jesus appears to in Mark's gospel?
2. Within our ministry to children, what are we doing well?
3. Are there areas of our church life where young people feel excluded?
4. What might we do to enable our children to be and feel more integrated within the life and fellowship of St Paul's?
5. Discuss ways in which the models of faith we present to our children may help or hinder them in their faith journeys.
6. Is the concept of 'Sunday School' or 'Junior Church' outmoded?