

## **Kingdom Seeking? Cynicism Versus the Child**

Sermon on Mark 10:13-16

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*“Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child,  
will never enter it.”*

Like a little child - how? Well, for one thing, children then and now, are powerless and dependent on parents, just as, in truth, we are ultimately all dependent on God and Creation. And children are naive - in the sense of being open-minded and non-judgmental. They are curious and questioning beings. Until taught otherwise little children are authentic -- who they are on the inside is who they show on the outside. No pretending. No pretensions.

In ‘A Seeker’s Guide,’ Elizabeth Lesser quotes Jesus in today’s scripture, in reference to a conversation she overheard between two children. Her six- year-old son was in the bathtub with his best friend, on the very evening when the other boy’s mother had finally succumbed to cancer. Elizabeth heard her son ask his friend: “Where’s your mom?”

“She’s dead” he answered.

“I *know*, but where is she?”

“I don’t know. But I’m gonna ask my dad tomorrow.”

Lesser imagines that all religions sprang up from innocent questioning conversations like this. She suggests that to find our path to the Holy, to learn how to grow into God’s glorious Kingdom, spiritual seekers need to do what Jesus says: adopt the ‘beginner’s mind’ of children.

“Children learn because they have no shame about being bare beginners. They ask “Does the sky stop?” and “What does God look like?” When Jesus said, “Lest ye

become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven,” he was referring to this kind of guileless questioning. In their open, unaffected, optimistic curiosity, children model the spiritual path.

How many of us have been ashamed to ask our spiritual questions out loud? Who hasn't felt that they should censor their intuitions about God or the meaning of life, for fear of being judged 'naive' or 'stupid' or crazy or 'wrong'? Were you ever made to feel dumb or bad about what you didn't know or what you couldn't believe? So maybe you just stopped letting yourself think that way? Maybe you gave up on getting to know God better?

If you were censored for honestly exploring your relationship with whatever or whoever you feel is sacred, that is sad and I'm sorry. I can imagine Jesus saying, "Let the little children bring their questions to me! - And let the adults perceive God just as freely!" You know how when people asked Jesus questions, he usually asked a question back? Well, if you ask Jesus a question about God, I think, like good spiritual parents do with their children, he would respond: "What do *you* think?" (Nobody can teach us anything we don't already know inside. But good teachers can affirm our intuitive experience of the Holy.)

In the history of modern Christendom, lots of adults lost their way to the Kingdom because their natural spiritual path of exploration was strewn with dropped questions. The church blocked the way with the debris of dogma and our western culture set up a roadblock of cynicism. I understand that it is the work of the emerging Christian church to clear the debris of dropped questions, dogma and cynicism that blocks our way to wonder.

Lesser says, if we draw a long line and put modern cynicism at the start and 'child's mind' or 'beginner's mind' at the end, we'd be drawing today's pilgrim's path to the Kingdom. She writes "Somehow our culture has evolved to the point where pessimism has become synonymous with intelligence, and where an overload of

information is mistaken for knowledge. Admitting we don't know something doesn't come easily for the modern person. Voicing innocence and a sense of wonder is difficult; it can only mean we've read too many Hallmark cards. But children are not sentimental, nor are they lacking in intelligence. Rather, they are unafraid to admit their status as a beginner, to say to the world 'I don't know. Please show me.' This doesn't mean to be spiritual is to remain a child...." To be as a child is to re-discover the pure water of an open heart and mind "before it was clouded by conditioning."

In thinking about our Baptism today, it occurred to me that we have dropped the idea of baptism washing away sin, because we recognize our children are innocents. But perhaps today we can think of these waters as washing away our cynicism. Could our baptismal repentance be turning away from our culturally conditioned path of cynicism that leads us to expect only the negative probabilities, and turning towards the open infinite field of Kingdom possibilities in this moment.

Let's skip out into the expanse of Creation with child-like expectation? Could we open ourselves to become "not know-it-alls" like our little children? We might discover some of the spiritual wisdom and gifts we have bypassed in our adult cynicism? Glory be to this moment! Where are you God? I'm watching for you - while I play in your garden!... There you are!! (*pointing to someone*)

If we watch the children, and really just be with them, as Jesus did - with open eyes and hearts and arms, we'll open up our own way to the Kingdom. Present to the world like curious, open-hearted children, we can be the antidote for the cynicism in our culture that blocks God out.

Recently, while reading Monia Mazigh's inspiring memoir: "Hope & Despair: My Struggle to Free My Husband Maher Arar" I was moved by her reflections on being accompanied by her little children through years of political and spiritual struggle. She accessed the Kingdom of Hope, amidst despair, by being 'as a little child.' She writes: "I lost what many families try so hard to build: stability. I lived my life

from day to day, not knowing when misfortune would strike again. My husband's name, those of my children, and even my own were linked to terrorism. But though I have long lost my childhood enthusiasm, I have not lost my ability to look at the world like a child. I have kept my naivety and a kind of innocence that has many times saved me from falling into depression and pessimism. When I learned later, in the course of the public inquiry, that certain individuals in the government apparatus had done their utmost to block my husbands' return, and to obstruct me in Canada, I thanked God with all my heart for protecting my faith, and the hope that better days would come.

My two children, Baraa and Houd, were my constant companions in my search for justice; they were a constant source of inspiration, the wellspring of hope from which every day I drew the courage I needed to pursue my path. In their simple desire to play, speak, and simply to grow, they helped me keep my feet firmly planted on the ground. When I looked into their eyes, I understood that life goes on above and beyond our misfortunes, and that there is always meaning to be found, even in our worst of trials"

So whatever your trials, trust the Christ child within you who knows God. Look to the children around you for how to hope. Jesus invites us all to trade in our cynicism for a child's eyes. No matter how old you are, remember the Baptismal promise: you are, as you always have been and will be, Creation's beloved, wide-eyed **child!**

VU # 445 A Little Child the Saviour Came