

September 10, 2017

**Reading from the Bible** *Mark 9:33-37, 10:13-16*

**Sermon** Sermon Series: Three Great Loves

*“Children Should Be \_\_\_\_\_”*

This morning as we turn to the scriptures, we are going to turn to the Gospel of Mark. We have two separate readings in the Gospel, the first is Mark 9:33-37. This gives us an interesting setting for the traditional story of the blessings of the children.

Mark 9:33-37 “Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”

And then turning over to Mark 10: 13-17 “People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.”

The three loves that we are going to have in next three weeks are shared missions from our denomination. Denominations put out a lot of stuff, some of it makes a lot of sense and some of it is so-so. This seems to be exciting and is rather good, it is not about money, it isn't raising money for the denomination which is good which they usually want, and it isn't about one big project or one big event. It is about congregations. Every congregation has different settings, different people, needs, or passions. In the next couple of years there will be several larger events, one is survey of basic human need; one will be a food supply -- what a surprising idea-we already beat them to it- we already do that and we already give to the food bank, and one we will raise money for the care of the earth. The three loves has to do with lasting impact also have an impact for justice for all. We'll talk about justice in a minute sometimes we are nervous about that word.

What is it we are going to be called to do? In our shared mission is story telling. They are hoping that at least 50% in this congregation in this denomination will have a story to tell of how they favorable impacted the life of children, the life of strangers and cared for them. They expect and hope to get stories about how we

did it. They want about 3,000 stories. We could already think of a couple and we have barely started on it. What is a just world for all? That is the theme of our denomination. What does it mean to embody love to children- to strangers and all? We are called as disciples of the risen Christ to embody love and incarnate justice? What does it mean to be in the “flesh”, to be ‘Present?’ It is not to just to write a check or wish that people had all that they need but to be part of them. In the Bible God calls his people to lives of justice and mercy. And over again and again the law which was given to the people talked about the underdog, the widows, the orphans and the stranger, the alien dwelling among them. Over and over again the people were told to help those that don’t have the privileges that the people of God have. They were called to distribute, to help, and to welcome in many times and many places orphans, widows, aliens and others who didn’t have much of a chance.

And God’s justice is really based on leveling the playfield. In the Old Testament book of Micah, the prophet says, “Do you know what God wants from you? He wants you to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God” The prophet frequently pointed to unjust sales in the market place. Jesus pointed to the Pharisees who cheated widows out of their property. The Pharisees were supposed to be protecting them. The vulnerable group in every time may change. Virgin Mary’s song when she found out she was going to have the Messiah, she said, “When God looked upon my lowly state, he has raised up the lowly and he has brought down the proud and the mighty. He has heard the call of the needy.” That is justice. Jesus spoke against the Pharisee and their injustice. In Acts six, the Diaconate was formed when the deacons were first called because there was injustice. The Greek widows were not getting their fair share of the distribution of food. Remember in those days if you were a widow you were totally dependent upon your family. If you had no family there was no safety net. In the early church, the church was the safety net. And the widows were pointing out that the Greek widows were not getting as much food as the Jewish widows. And the disciples appointed deacons to take of the problem.

And then close to our own day, the American Missionary Association which was part of the Congregational Church, a hundred forty or hundred fifty years ago. They went to the South to teach newly freed slaves to read and write. Some of them were shot and killed; one was lynched. They knew that those people in order to be part of society had read and write. They went. They were a lot of women who said they would go and teach. A hundred years later, it was about registering the Blacks to vote. I never knew when I was growing up that voting was such a big deal to register to vote. I lived two houses down from the courthouse and my mother was on the election board. I was ready to vote the minute I turned 21 and later they changed it to 18. I was ready but nobody stood in my way. The United

Church of Christ had a lot of people down there registering the people to vote, in spite of the fact that first three people, who went there was killed.

We supply school support and food. 75% of children who attend alternative schools are homeless for example like the Pend Oreille River School here in Newport. They are left out. They are lots of reasons for their problems but our love for Jesus Christ is the reason for lifting them up. We give to the food bank; we don't ask who gets the food. The three loves in this project encourages us. We are encouraged by John C. Dorhauer the General Minister and President of our denomination who says "We can, we will, and we must make difference" Let our love light the way to a better world, a more just world, for children, for our neighbor and for creation." Serving our community is our testimony of our love of Christ.

Now the world has changed a lot. When I was growing up there was no children's church, you sat with your parents and no one paid any attention. You sat and were quiet. Maybe Mom brought some cheerio or brought a coloring book. Children were be seen but not heard. That was a couple of years ago. In the 80s and 90s when I worked in Centralia the start up of the Sunday school year was huge. We prepared and ordered curriculum and decided which rooms for which classes. I tried religiously to get my future nephew and others as teachers for their classes. They were not eager to teach either but they came forward and they taught. We had bang-up Sundays; we had adult Sunday school classes three at a time. Those days are gone and times have changed.

You may have noticed looking around here that this Sunday is the first time we had children in church for two months or more. That is not an indictment on our church but is an observation. People today have little or no guilt about not being in church on Sunday. Some people say that is not my thing. I'm spiritual but not religious. You can be sure their kids are not in Sunday school either. There are very few children connected to this congregation. Children's ministry, I bought this beautiful book by a really good author on children's ministry and there was not one word about where do you get them? I had to laugh at the irony of that. Where do you get them? We may have good principals, we might formula plans and ideas for the children to learn and grow up to be like Jesus. But where do we find the children? One of the things that we have to get past is children is not miniature adults. Some say "We have to reach children or youth or our church will die. We need to get another generation." That is one myth and not a good reason not to try and get more children. Another myth is if you get them here than their parents will come.

Instead we need to look at Jesus and what he was doing in the scriptures. We have to say something different is going there. Being faithful in our commitment to follow Jesus in our temporary culture as a whole we have to come to grips as to

why we have to have children in church or do we? Are we satisfied or are we reigned. I have to tell you that at least two people told me when I came here that there are some people here are sort of relieved that we don't have to deal with children in this church. They are noisy, rowdy they are hard on furniture. I don't know who he was, but we need to decide as a congregation that we are for children doesn't mean we let them do whatever they want. We need to have boundaries. It also means that we welcome them.

I have to ask our visiting girls a couple of questions. Did anyone say hello to them when they came? I saw several people in the back row who were encouraging the girls to come up for story time. Did any of you talk to the girls? Talk to them eye to eye- belly button to belly button? Remember when you were little that everything was a land of long legs.

Do we welcome Moms and tell her that in the far back of the Fellowship Hall there is a whole box of little toys-there are little cars and children are welcome to play with them. And we have that back room and maybe someday we will have a nursery. If someone comes with a baby, there will be a safe clean for them. How we welcome a family? How do you feel welcome? If the child walks or runs down the aisle of the church I can welcome them. What really does welcome them? If we welcome them on their level, and tell them about Jesus, they will feel safe and welcome here. They will be happy here. We can learn from them.

What was Jesus all about? I think a lot that he was about was leveling the playfield. If I understand what handicap in golf is or maybe you played basket ball and if you let the shorter kids move a little closer. Jesus is all about leveling the playfield for women, lepers, the mentally ill, the disabled, the blind or people who couldn't go to the synagogue or people who were not welcome.

So our attitudes have to be shifted to new day. We need to know how to welcome people who have never sat in church in their whole lives, who don't know what anything about church. Visitors who don't know where the bathrooms or our church routines. I know you are probably tired hearing this, but we have to watch that everything is not about us. You will notice in the bulletin now that the first song we sing is \*Alleluia and the page number is now printed in the bulletin. We know how to sing it but a newcomer would not know how or where to find it. They wouldn't have a clue what to do or where to find it in the hymn book. So if you are new to our church, now you know where to find it. And you can feel like one of us. The difference between tolerating children or strangers and loving them is huge. What was Jesus doing in the scripture he was showing us that even the least (the little child) can contribute to society. Children were just tossed away in those days. They didn't have any rights, they couldn't do anything; all they could do was eat. Jesus was saying they were every bit as important as the long line of adults waiting to shake his hand

Children should be what-----I think what Jesus would say is-- welcome. Children should be valued as they are now—not as adults in progress they should be loved. The early church invited them in—the pagan around them did not and it might be one of the reasons that the early church grew. It was family orientated. Children should be introduced to Jesus not by learning facts and verses but by looking at Jesus—what he did and how he lived and walked. Children had every right to be with Jesus and children should be our teachers. They are innocence and there is excitement.

What might that a welcome look like? Are we doing enough I can't say that and we'll have to think about that. How many of you go to school activities? There is Mountain Harmony where Chris, Lynn and others who work with the children. How many of you know of a child that is not here? Maybe you know child who might be in your neighborhood? I bet you there are some in your neighborhood. If you go to Safeway do you ever see a child and think about him/her? Do you ever pray for that child and parent? I pray for them when I hear them crying, I might cry with them. We need to break down the barriers. A neighborhood woman who had a cookie jar and children came to her house for cookies every day after school. All the children knew and loved her because she loved them. Maybe someday we will have a Family Night, a Mission Night. Maybe we'll do something on New Year's Eve, or maybe do a one-day event like DVBS during Christmas vacation. Maybe something special for a no school day-or after school event or read books to first graders. Could we go and for 15 minutes read to children. Could we let the school know that the people in the United Church of Christ have a team that wants to come to their children? I want you to be thinking what are the ways that we love a child are. There is a little prayer in the bulletin-take it home and look for children. Dear Lord, we thank you for your great love for us, for your love for the outsiders, love for the people who can't do for themselves and that would be for us. Thank you for all you have given us more than enough and that we can be witnesses in the world. May every child that we see that they will know they are valued and loved. May we take every opportunity to witnesses to your children and family Amen