

Pentecost 19 (Lectionary 27) Year B October 03, 2021  
Mark 10:2-16  
Epiphany, Winnipeg

“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

Two parents woke up one night to the sound of their two year old gasping for breath in the room next door. It sounded so strange to them, and at first as they tried to wake up they couldn't figure out what it was as this unfamiliar sound broke in through the darkness, but it dawned on them suddenly that it was their child, and they ran into the room and saw him sitting up, and wheezing, and struggling to take in some air. He looked at them with his own fear in his eyes and expected something because they were the ones who looked after him and made things OK, but right then they had no idea what to do. They lived far out of town so there wasn't a doctor or a hospital around the corner, and the scene just became a scene of two parents and their son sitting on the corner of the bed, the little boy curled up in the arms of people he trusts, and after what seemed like forever his breathing returned, and he fell asleep safely in his parents' arms.

To receive the kingdom of God, the realm of God; to receive that as a child, is to receive it like that little boy who knew that once he was in his parents' arms it would be OK. He didn't know that they were scared too; he just settled in and let them wrap up his fear in their arms. He didn't even know that they too were letting themselves be wrapped in God's arms, and trusting that God would know what to do.

Yes, that's what we hoped that night. And that's about all we had. And it carried us through.

To receive the realm of God as a little child....That's what Jesus means....it's trust.

But that's not all.

A child isn't just fear and trust and settling into mom's arms, and this is where the fun begins. One of the very first things a child does after they draw their first breath is start telling whoever will listen what they need. If you've had kids you know the routine. A newborn just knows how to demand quite clearly that they need to be fed, and they will let you know when the diaper's not right and it needs to be changed, and even if the blanket's too tight they'll let you know. A child's cry can mean Mom gave me food when I needed to eat, someone cleaned me up when I couldn't do it myself, somebody came to see me when I called out from my room. They know what I need, and I'll let them know when I need it.

To receive the realm of God like a little child... That's what Jesus means: it's demanding. To receive the realm of God like a little child is to be like that little girl's mom we heard about in the gospel a few weeks ago, that woman from Syria who came to Jesus and as much as said, "I've heard all about you, that you heal people. Heal my daughter." And she wouldn't take no for an answer. Or the man whose son had had seizures for his whole life and who comes to Jesus and says, "Heal my son. Please." To receive the realm of God as a child does is to call out to the one who has fed the hungry, or who has welcomed strangers, or challenged the authorities, or raised the dead, and to say, "We need this too."

Maybe that's what's happening when the poor call out to be fed, or when a crowd marches in orange shirts, or a woman keeps on asking, "what happened to my child who disappeared?" We know the stories of how God's kingdom comes to the world in Jesus, and we know the big story, that Christ is risen and all that life lives on... And to receive the realm of God as a child does is to insist that the life-giving gifts of the realm of God be given.

It might not be polite, but who ever said a crying newborn is polite?

“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child does will never enter it.”

It’s all over the Bible, I guess. We heard the first small piece of the book of Job a few minutes ago. Here are all 42 chapters of Job – well, maybe the first 39 - in a really small nutshell: Job is a rich and successful farmer, rancher, and family man, and he’s faithful and loves God, and God and Satan strike a deal to see how faithful he really is, and Job loses everything. His friends tell him that it’s all part of God’s plan – it almost sounds like it? – and that if you suffer you’re just getting what you deserve. And all the way through Job insists, “No, no, no, it’s not fair.” Job even puts the God he trusts and loves on trial.

Job’s acting like a child. And that’s a good thing. Like a child stamping her foot and saying “That’s not fair!” when she sees “the good kid” in school get away with something that no one else would. Or like someone who sees one community boiling its drinking water and another getting it clean straight out of the tap... and they say, “That’s not fair, it’s not right.” That’s how to receive the realm of God like a child – like Job; like a child who knows injustice when they see it.

Or like Jesus, when the religious leaders say, “Our tradition says that a man who’s tired of his wife can sign a note on the dotted line and send her on her way to fend for herself. They’re right. They’re quoting the Bible. And Jesus disagrees. Like a confirmation student who says to the pastor, “I don’t agree.” Or a parishioner who says to the pastor on the way out of the service, “I think you didn’t get it right in that sermon today.”

Or, to go back to today’s gospel reading: The world and the church have come to an understanding that divorce can’t simply be forbidden, because so often it’s simply the best of the options available. So when even Jesus seems to

be saying that it's just always wrong, someone in the room will stand up and say, "I don't agree." And so many in the room will feel the same way. Maybe even that is receiving the realm of God like a child, because I've known – and maybe you have too - a child who has the nerve to say (even to me and I'm the dad!), "I think you're wrong."

And the relationship keeps on going...

It's a rich and complicated thing, this receiving the realm of God like a child. But it's a simple thing too, as simple as saying that the realm of God is always receiving us. The kingdom of God that Jesus always says is coming near, is always receiving us with open arms - as we trust and obey, as we disagree and stamp our feet "That's not fair," as we gaze in wonder at the world around us – like a six-month-old discovering their hand for the first time. Even now, as we gasp for breath in a world turned upside down, the kingdom of God is receiving us, and will see us through, and we will breathe again, and the world will breathe again, and we will have life. Always life.

AMEN.