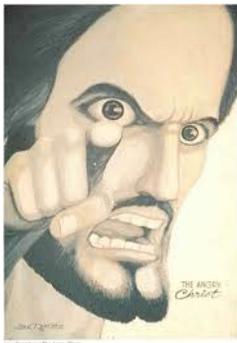


What Makes You Angry
November 11, 2018
Mark 10:13-16, Genesis 33:12-14
The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights
Pastor Dave Carver

To hear this sermon as preached in worship, please visit
<https://castyournet.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/sermon11-11-2018.mp3>

Today we have another example of why things become complicated when you have to announce the sermon title before you've done your research for the message itself. One of the translations of today's Gospel portion talks about Jesus becoming "angry" at the disciples.



¹When I saw the version that you've just heard, though, I noticed that the word "indignant" was used. That got me wondering, and so I did a little digging. The word that Mark uses when he is trying to describe how Jesus is feeling is *aganakteo*. The best Greek dictionaries tell us that can be translated as "to have great indignation", "to be greatly displeased", "to be pained", or "to be vexed." I've come to believe that the best equivalent in modern English for the ancient Greek *aganakteo* is a word that, according to 73% of the respondents to a poll at daycare.com, polite people should not say in church. So, in the interest of not having my mother roll over in her grave or my wife be disappointed in me, I won't tell you that the best translation for *aganakteo* is a word that rhymes with "missed" or "kissed" and means, well, really, really displeased and angry.

That word is used seven times in the New Testament, all in the Gospels. In every other instance, you get a sense of the meaning:

- Ten of the disciples overhear James and John talking privately with Jesus, evidently looking to score some nice

¹ *Angry Christ* by Lino Pontebon (Phillipines late 20th c.)

- box seats in the heavenly kingdom. They are really...indignant... and they pull the brothers aside and say, “Yo, dudes, what the heck?”
- Judas and other onlookers are present when a woman breaks open a vial of very costly perfume and smears it all over Jesus’ feet. They get...vexed...and say, “Oh, for crying out loud! What a waste! That money could have been better spent!”
 - Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath, and the religious rule-keepers – men who thought that they were in control and were kind just to invite this young Rabbi in as a guest on their show – get really...irritated... and declare that Jesus has no right to heal people on the Sabbath
 - And when Jesus makes his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the crowds are going crazy, fervor is sweeping the city, and the religious leaders are totally... displeased... and say, “Teacher, make them shut up!”

Do you see? Each of the other uses of this word in our Bibles refers to a situation wherein someone sees another person receiving special treatment or getting something that they themselves wanted, and that makes them really *aganakteo*-d off.

Except here. What is it that ticks Jesus off so badly?



²Well, it’s someone messing with the Children’s Sermon. There are parents who have brought their children to see Jesus (and I think that it’s safe to say that probably means that these are women who long to have their children see the Master). The disciples, though, stand in the way. Jesus gets irritated with his followers and says, “Let those kids in. Do not hinder them.”

For a long time, I played racquetball with Adam and Tim once a week over at Carnegie Mellon. There’s a very interesting

² *Let The Little Children Come To Me*, Lucas Cranach the Elder (1538)

rule in racquetball called the “hinder”. If you’ve never played that sport, it involves standing inside a box with another player (or 3 other players); everyone is swinging clubs around while chasing a little ball that is flying all over the place. From time to time, you just can’t help but be in someone else’s way. If you and I are playing, and where I’m standing prevents you from doing what you can and should do, it’s called a “hinder”, and we start over.

Jesus is ticked off because his followers are intentionally engaging in behavior that prevents children from receiving what is rightfully theirs and becoming who they were meant to become. If you’ve been here in recent weeks, this will not be surprising to you – a few weeks ago we heard that the only time Jesus talks about the idea of Hell in the Gospel of Mark was when those around him – those who claimed to know him best – were callous to the cries of the weak and vulnerable. It is therefore less than shocking to see that Jesus is indignant when his followers would limit the ability of children to draw near to him.

I wonder...are there any ways in which the children who ought to be drawn safely and closely to Jesus are being hindered by those in positions of power and authority now?

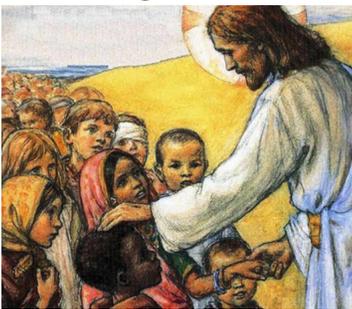
I know. That seems like an impossibly easy question. The news has been full in recent years of instances wherein people who have had great positions of prestige and leadership within the church have used and abused children wantonly and shamelessly. I hope that I don’t have to convince you that that kind of treachery and manipulation is certainly contrary to God’s intentions and most assuredly...um... vexes Jesus.

But we can’t stop there, dear friends. Are there other ways in which children are being hindered – kept from the blessings that are rightfully theirs?

Do the decisions that we and our leaders make about educational policy have anything to do with hindering at least

some of the children?

In many parts of the world, including right here in the USA, our children are being raised in a climate of fear and distrust. Bullying is the norm in far too many places, “active shooter drills” are required in schools and day cares, and racial tension seems to be on the rise... while far too many of us throw up our hands and say, “Hey, that’s the world we live in. What are you gonna do?” I am sad to say that I believe that in these instances, too many of us are not “vexed” enough to be motivated to change things.



Similarly, we hinder children’s ability to participate in the blessings of Jesus if we raise them to believe that they are better than other people – if we do anything to communicate to the children with whom we are entrusted that their family’s wealth, or ethnicity, or geography makes them more special to Jesus or superior to other children around the world, we limit the ways that they can hear the full call of Jesus in this world.

There are other examples, perhaps ones that you’d find more applicable, but my point is this: that when the disciples hindered those kids on the Palestinian hillside 2000 years ago, it wasn’t the last time that followers of Jesus stood between him and children he loves. Not by a long shot.

So what is his teaching on this? What does he say? He encourages his followers to themselves become like the children who occasioned this conversation. “Anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it...”

Ok, great. So what does *that* mean? In what respects are we to imitate children in seeking to participate in the Kingdom? I suspect that we know enough about children to understand that he was not saying that we should model their humility. Seriously

– have you seen how amazingly (and undeservedly) self-confident children are? He cannot have been lifting up the childish trait of almost zero self-awareness. Children are, by and large, the center of their own universes. Nor was Jesus imploring us to seek to somehow develop the emotional maturity of your average eight year old. While all of us have known or seen religious, cultural, and political leaders who seem to flourish in their own bubble of self-aggrandizement and self-validation, seemingly immune to the cries of those around them, this was not the kind of behavior that Jesus was inviting his followers to emulate.

When Jesus invites us to become as little children, I think that he is encouraging us to trust in the presence and purposes of the Lord. In spite of the way that we hinder them, many children are shining examples of what it means to trust that the grown-ups around them are able and willing to care for them in any and every circumstance.

This was brought home to me very personally recently when my daughter relayed a conversation she had had with our five year-old granddaughter. Lucia had announced that she intended to take part in a certain activity, and Ariel reminded her that it was on a day when Sharon and I had planned to be in Ohio. Lucia said quickly, “I know that. And I’m telling you that Grampy will be *delighted* to take me swimming.” That little girl is so convinced of the love and care that Sharon and I have for her that she plans on that love being present in her life every day.

Can I take a page from Lucia’s book? Am I so convinced of God’s willingness to care for me and of God’s ability to do the same that I plan my days as if God’s provision were true? Am I teachable? Am I willing to realize that my own knowledge and experience and understanding is limited, but I have access to the One who is the source of all knowledge and understanding? And moreover, that that One has a care for and an interest in me? Can I trust in One like that? And if I do – does it re-shape my relationship with you and those around me?



That's what Jesus says. And lastly, look at what Jesus *does*. "He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them." Friends, this is not an account of a formal benediction. The language is rich and full here. Jesus embraces the children. He holds them. He blesses them – with depth and feeling and intent. Jesus spoke about the importance of being *like* children – but here he indicates that he not only values the qualities of childlikeness, but that he actually loves *children*.

What is the call to the church in this passage? It seems clear to me that a key aspect of our self-understanding as the body of Christ is that we exist in part in order to love and serve children. Unlike so many of his contemporaries in the ancient world, Jesus did not see children as 'adults in waiting'. Jesus did not see children as those who would become something important some day; Jesus saw children as *people* – as those made in the image of God who deserved respect, care, and encouragement.

During the recent visit from our African partners, my brother Davies Lanjesi said to me, "Pastor, I have heard people all over the world talk about children. They say that the children are the future of the church, and they talk about how to prepare the children to build up the church once they are able. But I have seen that is not how you do things in Crafton Heights. At Crafton Heights, the children are not the future of the church. The children are the church right now."

I hope that my brother is correct. I hope that every time a child walks through these doors, there is a welcome and a joy. And I'm sorry for some of you, but if you and I are talking and someone three feet tall comes up and attempts to engage me in conversation, I'm going to ignore you – because I think that's the 'Jesus-y' thing to do. I hope and pray that every single time I touch one of you or one of your children, it is indeed a touch of blessing and an affirmation of God's presence. If I get that wrong,

I need you to tell me.

When the early followers of Jesus started to form communities, they lived into this. At a time when the surrounding cultures saw children as disposable and inconsequential, the early church made it their business to rescue those children who had been abandoned by their parents and to raise them in the community of faith.

That call is no less urgent today. I know, I know – perhaps you've been listening to this message and saying, "See! That's why we have the Crafton Heights Community Preschool. That's why we have the Open Door." And I love these institutions. But at the end of the day, they are institutions. They are often fragile and sometimes clumsy programmatical efforts to embody this command of Jesus. But Preschool and the Open Door are not enough. May we, individually as well as corporately, commit ourselves to being those who are deserving of children's trust. May we do all we can – each of us - to nurture them in an environment that is free from abuse and from fear. And may we pledge never to stand between the children and Jesus, and ever and always to firmly plant ourselves between those children whom God loves and anything that would hinder them. May we build ourselves there like a wall! Thanks be to God! Amen.