

Week 31
April 26, 2009

The Kingdom of Children

Matthew 18:1-6, 19:13-14

1. READ Matthew 18:1-6.
2. The disciples want to know who's greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In two other gospels, you get the sense that they are actually quarreling about this. Why are people so consumed with the need to be important?
3. Jesus indicates that the first will be last and the last first. The greatest will be least and the least will be greatest. What does that mean? Talk about how you might envision heaven in light of these teachings.
4. Jesus brings a child into their midst. "You must become like one of these or you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." What does it mean to be "like a child?"
5. Are you a childlike person? Why? Why not? How? How so?
6. Can you imagine any ways in which you could be more childlike?
7. Obviously, there's a difference between being **CHILDLIKE** and **CHILDISH**. What are some of those differences?
8. Jesus cares deeply about the treatment of children. Can you think of a time when you've "caused a little one to stumble?" How have you processed that mistake or altered that behavior?
9. Jesus issues a "woe" against all those who lead others into sin. Why does Jesus seem even more concerned about the ways we lead others into sin than about the ways we personally fall into it?

For the hardcore group:

Many people, **ESPECIALLY** in our corner of the world, seem to revere a more composed, restrained, unaffected, cool, smart and sophisticated sheen—more than childlikeness. While our business culture rewards curiosity and childlike inventiveness, our social environment seems *buttoned up*. For example:

- The standing joke about 49er fans is that we clap politely while we eat our sushi.
- A document issued by the local chamber of commerce introduces newcomers to the area with the observation/warning that couples "don't show affection publically."
- It's unlikely that a charismatic or physically expressive Christian movement would even try to start a church in Saratoga.

- If ten couples in the inland valley got together they might have a rousing game of Bunco or charades or some other very active game that includes uproarious laughter and risky levels of involvement. If ten couples get together in our area, it's far more likely that people will stand and talk politely in small clusters and then go home.

There are, of course, exceptions to all of this, BUT...

What is this about? Are we a culture of relative introversion? Are people too busy and exhausted to be more expressive and enthusiastic? Does the education level of our immediate surroundings lend toward some cynicism or skepticism about various enthusiasms? Have we so privatized our lives that we reserve our passion for business ventures and personal hobbies? How do you read our culture in regard to childlikeness? What effect does surrounding culture have on your childlikeness and that of your loved ones?

Jesus was obviously a pleasure to be with, or else "sinners and tax collectors" would have steered clear, instead of inviting him to dinner. Does your faith shape you in ways that make you an instrument of joy, among other salty influences? Why? Why not?

If you disagree with this whole conversation, elucidate!