October 11, 2015
Mark 10:13-16
*On the Mend: Healing What Ails Us – Healing Trust*

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Mark 10:13-16 New Revised Standard Version

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.

Owne Wister, an old college friend of Theodore Roosevelt, was visiting him at the White House. Roosevelt's daughter Alice kept running in and out of the room until Wister finally asked if there wasn't something Roosevelt could do to control her. The President said, "Well, I can do one of two things. I can be President of the United States or I can control Alice. I cannot possibly do both."[[1]](#footnote-2)

 Today is a day when we celebrate the children in our church family. Today is a day when we pray for children around the world. Children’s Sabbath or Children’s Sunday is sponsored by the Children’s Defense Fund and it is a way for faith communities to celebrate children as sacred gifts of the Divine and it is an opportunity for us to renew and live out our moral responsibility to care, protect, and advocate for all children. The Children’s Defense fund grew out of the Civil Rights Movement under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman. Mrs. Edelman was the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar and she was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s counsel for his Poor People’s Campaign.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Marian Wright Edelman wrote a parent’s pledge affirming our commitment to children of this church, community and beyond. The pledge says, “I promise to listen to my children. Communicate with my children. Teach my children right from wrong and be a good role model for them. Spend time with and pay attention to my children. Educate my children in mind, body, and soul. Work to provide a stable family life for my children. Pray for and see God in my children and in all children. Vote for my children to ensure them fair opportunity. Speak out for my and other people’s children’s needs.”

 But children are hard. It is hard when we are talking to folks after church and kids are running around. It is hard when we are trying to worship quietly and children are making noises. There was a man in a grocery store who was pushing a cart which contained, among other things, a screaming baby. As the man walked down the aisles, he kept repeating softly, “Keep calm, George. Don’t get excited George. Don’t get excited George. Don’t yell George.” A woman was watching this man with admiration and she said to him, “You are certainly to be commended for your patience in trying to quiet little George.” The man looked a little confused and said to the woman, “I’m George.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

 The presence of children is a gift to the Church and they are a reminder that our church is growing. It is up to all of us to welcome our children and to give their parents a smile of encouragement. God put the wiggle in children and it should not have to be suppressed in God’s house. And children learn how to behave in worship by watching all of our behavior and copying it. And the way that we welcome children in church directly affects the way that those children are going to respond to the Church, to God, and to one another. It is our responsibility to let the children of this church know that they are at home in this house of worship.[[4]](#footnote-5)

 We have this wonderful story in our scripture about Jesus blessing the children. You have probably seen paintings or stained glass windows with this scene. Little children, whom the disciples perceive as a nuisance, are to be sent away.[[5]](#footnote-6)  But Jesus refused to send the little children away.  Instead, Jesus hugged the children and he blessed them.

This scripture tells us about God. We love our children, but children are demanding. And children are utterly dependent on others for nearly everything. Jesus wants us to know that God is the one who brings individuals together into community.  That's how we got the church.  God took us as different individuals, many of us quite unlike one another, and brought us together into communion in the church.

And in this church there are people who take responsibility for children who are not their biological children, but are theirs as a gift of God.[[6]](#footnote-7)

 Jesus is pretty clear that children hold the keys to the kingdom of God. Jesus repeatedly invites people to become more like children in order to receive the world as God intends. So, what is it about children that we are to seek in order to reside in the healing wholeness of God? It may be in the way the children come to Jesus, the way that children are willing to be taken up in Jesus’ arms, trusting Jesus for blessing and not harm. What in our lives has damaged the trusting child within each of us that keeps us back, keeps us scared and skeptical of the goodness of God?[[7]](#footnote-8)

 We have to risk joy and risk being vulnerable. I used to love to swing, the excitement of going high up into the air and then that free-falling feeling as I came back down to the ground. Have you swung lately? It is terrifying! That joy and excitement that I used to feel when I was a child has turned into great fear.

 Did you hear about a new app called Peeple? It is yelp for people. You load a picture of yourself and then people rate you from 1-5 stars. The creators say that it is meant to be the world’s largest positivity app, but of course I can only see bad things happening from this app because we love to tell other people how horrible we think they are, especially when we can be anonymous as we do it.

So I ask again, what in our lives has damaged the trusting child within each of us that keeps us back, keeps us scared and skeptical of the goodness of God? Sometimes it is the church which hurts us. My mom worked with a woman who had come from Mexico as a 10 year-old child with her family. They lived in a neighborhood in Houston that was experiencing changes as there was an influx of people from Mexico. Her family attended a big Catholic Church in the community and as a young child she heard people at church talk about “those people” who had come here illegally. Even as a child she knew she was "those people." She never forgot the feeling of isolation while seeking the community of the church. She went on to become a citizen, a successful employee, a college graduate, and a certified teacher. But she never forgot the feelings she had in a church where she wanted desperately to feel safe. No matter what the church says, you are a child of God.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Jesus says there appear to be no limits to the love of God. We are of course only human. There are limits upon our love, but the love of God does not have such limits.  We can attempt to separate ourselves from God, but Jesus implies here God does not separate from us.[[9]](#footnote-10)

 In the Gospel of Mark, we are on our way to seeing just how far God in Christ will go for us, all the way to death on a cross. And on his way to death of a cross, Jesus takes a moment to teach us.  The disciples of Jesus are to have love, compassion, and mercy for the needs of the children and the poor and the severely mentally disabled and the sick and infirmed. And we will fall short but God loves us limited human beings in a limitless divine way. And we have a God who forgives our failures, who loves us in spite of our limits to love in return. In spite of our inabilities, our limits and failures, God is limitlessly loving and always faithful.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Church is a community of the broken, of the vulnerable, of those at risk. It’s a community of those who know their need and seek to be in relationship with each other because they have learned that by being in honest and open relationship with each other they are in relationship with God, the very one who created them for each other in the first place. Church is supposed to be a place for all those who had been broken by life or rejected by the powerful and who came to experience God through the crucified Jesus as the One who met them in their vulnerability, open to the brokenness and need of those around them. Being broken isn’t something to be ashamed of. To be broken is to be human. And to be human is to be loved by God and drawn together into relationship with all the others that God loves. [[11]](#footnote-12)

We are surrounded by those who are hurting but also healing, those who are lost but have also been found, those that know their need and seek not simply to have those needs met but have realized that in helping meet the needs of others their own are met in turn. We are a community of the broken, but God loves us and is healing us and is using us to make all things new.[[12]](#footnote-13) Praise be to God, Amen.

1. From *Bits & Pieces*, December 9, 1993, p. 16. Found here:<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/parenting.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.childrensdefense.org/about/#About [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Anonymous story, found here: http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/parenting.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. This paragraph taken from a picture seen on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/CatholicVote/photos/a.290714208603.146622.70874333603/10152497739468604/?type=3&theater [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Taken from http://day1.org/1472-let\_the\_little\_ones\_come\_unto\_me [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Much of this paragraph taken from http://day1.org/1472-let\_the\_little\_ones\_come\_unto\_me [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. From Marcia McFee’s worship design studio sermon series, On the Mend. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Mark Miller’s song, Child of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. http://day1.org/1472-let\_the\_little\_ones\_come\_unto\_me [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Much of this paragraph taken from <http://day1.org/1472-let_the_little_ones_come_unto_me> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Much of this paragraph taken from http://www.davidlose.net/2015/09/pentecost-19-b-communities-of-the-broken-and-blessed/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Much of this paragraph taken from http://www.davidlose.net/2015/09/pentecost-19-b-communities-of-the-broken-and-blessed/ [↑](#footnote-ref-13)