

## Written Copy: Mark 10:13-16 “Who Is Worthy of His Kingdom?”

Life Sunday: 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### Text: Mark 10:13-16

<sup>13</sup> And they began to bring little children to Him so that He might hold them, but the disciples admonished them. <sup>14</sup> However after Jesus saw this He became really irritated, and He said the them, “Permit the little children to keep on coming to me! Stop preventing them! For the reign and rule of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup> I am telling you for sure: whoever shall not receive the reign and rule of God as a little child does shall never enter into it.”<sup>16</sup> And after taking them into His arms He proceeded to bless them by placing His hands upon them.

### The text’s intent

To demonstrate that worthiness to receive Jesus’ gracious reign and rule cannot be found in a person’s age or mental ability to understand the Gospel Message. No one is worthy or can earn or can decide to believe in Jesus. It is only by the work of the Holy Spirit in a heart that receives the faith being given as a gracious gift, unearned and undeserved. This happens when the hardheartedness of the sinful heart is broken and the gifts of faith received as a total act of grace. As followers of Jesus, we should not be like His disciples and put any kind of pre-conditions on who is worthy of His grace, for by ourselves none are. It’s only His gracious gift of love that makes anyone worthy.

### Focus Statement:

You are welcomed into Jesus’ reign and rule and made children of the Heavenly Father not because of anything you have done or could do, and not by any decision you could make. From before the foundation of the world the LORD decided that you should be a His own special child. It was by His intentional work alone that you were given the gracious gifts of salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life through the Gospel Message, coming to you through His means of grace, that placed in your heart and life all that Christ won for you in His life, death, and resurrection. Each and every life is precious to Him. It is He who made you worthy to be His child now, and into eternal life.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it’s important to know:

We can fall into the mindset of other Christians and those outside the Church that one has to be worthy in some way to receive God’s blessing, that we have to change first, have a certain mental capacity, or make a decision to believe before we are welcomed in His family of faith.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Understand and take comfort in the fact that your being a believer was not by accident or your choice. You were chosen by Christ before you were born. He is responsible for you coming to faith and remaining in faith. We should never judge anyone else as being unworthy, as it is only the Spirit through the work of conversion that makes anyone worthy.

### Subject Sentence: Only Christ Makes us worthy of His Eternal Kingdom

## **Introduction: Deciding Who's Worthy Of Employment**

One of my jobs as a manager at Hiller's Market was to interview and hire employees. This wasn't an easy task, despite what upper management sometimes seem to think it was. They seemed to think all you had to do was to search through what they seemed to think was a plethora of worthy applicants and find as many suitable employees as necessary. Now at that time we didn't have the problem of finding people interested in a job like most retail businesses seem to have today. Very seldom did we have to put an ad in the paper, or even a "Help Wanted" sign in the window. At the stores I worked at, the folder that held all applications was always pretty full. The problem was with the quality of applicants.

When hiring I found it necessary to make judgments on a potential employee's work ethic through their outward appearance. In many cases it didn't take long to see that hiring this person would be a bad idea. What kind of things would tip me off? When they would come in reeking of B.O., not thinking it necessary to shower before the interview, or they were wearing clothes that were more appropriate to go party in rather than work in and with the public. And speaking of partying, there were those who came in reeking of alcohol, or marijuana, looking red eyed and stoned. Now what they did on their own time was one thing, but it was telling when they couldn't even stay straight and sober long enough to interview for a job. When Facebook (and its predecessor 'My Space) came along it made weeding out the undesirables easier. Many would actually have pictures and stories of the wild life they lived and the illegal vices they enjoyed posted for all to see, including potential employers like me.

By this time the work ethic in the younger generations was disappearing. Even those who appeared to be responsible often didn't want to come in and work on a weekend, which is when places like grocery stores and other retail outlets are at their busiest and need employees to work. So, anyone who showed that partying was more important than earning a living had to be weeded out,

It's one thing to pre-judge someone applying for a job. It's another thing to prejudge those who Jesus wants to include into His kingdom-His reign and rule. It's another thing for Christians to see themselves as inherently more worthy of Jesus kingdom, His reign and rule, than those who do not look like, act like, vote like, or have the same values as they do. But we, we would never be guilty of such a thing...would we?

## **The Disciples Judging Who Was Worthy of Jesus Time**

In our Gospel Lesson we see Jesus' disciples doing some "pre-screening" of those who would like to have some one-on-one time with Him. We see them actively preventing parents from bringing their young children to be blessed by Jesus. This really ticks Jesus off. He becomes irritated with them for doing this. But the question to be considered is why is He so angry about this?

One way we may be tempted to look at this is to envision it as similar to parents bringing their children to sit on Santa Clause's lap. We used to bring our kids to the mall to see Santa because it was a great photo opportunity, and we thought it would make them happy, and add to the whole excitement of Christmas. Looking back and remembering how scared they were to sit on this strange man's lap who dressed funny and had a long beard, I think we did it because it made us feel better, not them. Could the disciples be looking at this in a similar fashion? Parents bringing young children to sit on the famous Rabbi's lap to make the parent's feel better about themselves and the safety and security of their child in this world?

However they saw it, Jesus' disciples judged that these children were not worthy of Jesus' time, at least not right now. The Master was teaching. And these were young children. The Greek word used to describe them can mean a child 7 years old or younger, all the way down to an infant being held in a mother's arms. Children of this age would not be the type to remain quiet and attentive as the Master taught His deep theological truths. So the disciples were saying, "***Sorry Mom and Dad, but this is no place for and not the time for your kids to interrupt serious teaching and healing. Take them away.***" It's this action and this kind of attitude that makes Jesus irate with them.

At this point we might be tempted to see Jesus' reason for being irate in another way, that He doesn't want to see the parents or the children's feelings hurt for being excluded. It's the same heart attitude that moves schools and organizations nowadays to have trophies and medals not just for those that win at competition, but for those who tried hard. And then again not just for those who tried, but for all those who simply participated, because we don't want anyone's feelings to be hurt. If the disciples were among those of us who see this attitude as not being helpful, but instead detrimental to the healthy upbringing of children, then you and I might join them in sending these kids away.

## **Why These Children Were Worthy of Jesus Time and Kingdom**

**Mark 10:14-15** <sup>14</sup> **But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."**

Jesus makes clear His anger over the disciples' screening process is none of these reasons, but something even deeper and vastly more important. His reason is a life-or-death issue because it's all about receiving His kingdom. Those who do not ever receive it like a child remain outside His kingdom, lost forever,

First off, we need to be clear on what is meant by “The Kingdom of God”. As people who have never been ruled by a king and being 2000 years outside of the context of what Mark was writing about, a better way to understand this is to call it Jesus’ gracious reign and rule. And where does He come to reign and rule? When did He come to reign and rule for you? In your heart, when you became a believer in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

For most of us this began with our baptism. For all of us it happened when the Holy Spirit, working through the means of the Gospel Message being preached, read, sung, or connected with the Sacrament of Baptism, poured into our hearts all that Jesus won for us on the cross. All of us were born into the devil’s kingdom and his reign and rule over us. As such, we could not help but serve him with our selfish hearts. That is until the Holy Spirit brought to bear upon your heart and your life forgiveness of all your sins, and salvation from the reign and rule of the devil. By His Almighty power and work, He saved you out of the devil’s reign and rule. and placed you under the gracious reign and rule of the Heavenly Father.

We call this work conversion. The Spirit recreated the heart you were born with, a selfish heart that wanted to please only you. Instead, He created in you a new heart, one filled with the grace and love of Christ. With that new heart, by the power of faith that the Holy Spirit created in you, you could look to and trust in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection as being for you. He created in you a heart that believes and trusts that you are no longer a child of the devil, but a precious child of the Heavenly Father, part of His gracious reign and rule. And as such you are an inheritor of His most precious gift: life with Him now that stretches all the way into eternity.

And what made you worthy of such a wonderful gift? Nothing. Nothing you could say or do or think. When the Spirit came to you to do this wonderful work, you and I were completely unworthy. And that is Jesus’ point when He says, “**whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.**” Nothing about these children made them worthy of such a gift. Most of them were not even old enough to make the choice necessary to decide to be a follower of Jesus. No matter what age you were when you first believed, you were unable to make any choice on salvation before the Spirit came into your heart, uninvited, and did the miracle of conversion. Receiving the Kingdom like a child is understanding it’s not about who I am, about what I’ve done, or about what choice I’ve made. It’s all about the intentional work of God Himself.

And how intentional was that work for you? Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:4 “...**he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.**” Before you were born, before the world had yet been created, God knew you, knew you would be born in sin. And He knew what He would make you to be, His precious child, a member of His kingdom. As is written in **Psalm 139:16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.** His work to bring you to faith and keep you in faith was intentional. And it was all orchestrated by Him. Whether it happened in your baptism as an infant, or later in life when someone shared the Gospel with you, it was the Spirit following through on God’s preordained plan for you. It was His desire that you should be His precious child, and He made sure it would happen. Why? Because He loves you so very much. He gave you life in your mother’s womb. He guided you to the baptismal font. He brought the person who shared the Gospel into your life at just the right time, all so that you would be His precious child, part of His eternal kingdom, His gracious reign and rule now and forever.

### **Who Should We See as Worthy of His Kingdom?**

So, who is worthy of His kingdom? You weren’t. I wasn’t. Without the work of His Spirit through the Law and the Gospel, breaking sin hardened hearts and doing the miraculous work of Conversion, no one is. Who can the Spirit do this work in? Anyone. Is there anyone who He cannot? Anyone He is not powerful enough to do so? No.

What does that mean for us, His Church, His arms and legs to bring that saving Gospel into the world? It means that while it was appropriate for me to judge who was worthy of being hired into Hillers, who is worthy to fix my car, or work on my house, I have no place judging who is worthy to be welcomed into His kingdom. Yet we consciously and unconsciously do that. We balk at times welcoming those into our midst, and even our worship, who look different than us, dress different than us, vote different than us, have ideas and values that are different than us. We think that they should change before they can receive the Gospel, before Jesus will really welcome them into His kingdom, His reign and rule, His Church.

When we do that do you think Jesus is as irritated with us as He was with His disciples then? It’s OK to say “Yes”. It’s confession. It’s OK because just as He did for His disciples then, His grace and mercy abound for you and for me today. He brings this Gospel Reading before my eyes and yours to remind us of this kingdom truth from Mark 10:15 **Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.** While it is a warning for us not to judge by our own standards who is worthy of His kingdom, His gracious reign and rule, it is also a message of great comfort. You were not worthy. The Holy Spirit did not wait for you to be worthy. He came to you just as you were and changed you. He brought Jesus’ work of salvation to bear on your life. It is Jesus who made you worthy, and declares you to be worthy to this day, even as you and I continue to fall short in thought, word, and deed.

## **Conclusion**

He makes infants worthy in baptism. He made you worthy, no matter who you were before and what you had done. And He keeps you worthy even as you still sin. He does this through Confession and Absolution. And He wants us to be as intentional in sharing His message of grace and forgiveness as He is about bringing those we meet to faith, even those we may see as unworthy, just as you and I once were. He can change them, and make them forever worthy, just as He has done for you and for me. Amen.