

Thursday, March 18

Today's Reading: Matthew Chapter 19

Today's Devotional Message is by Pastor Don Moorman

Some children were brought to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. The disciples told them not to bother him. But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." And he put his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left. Matthew 19:13-15 (NLT)

One of my mantras throughout my ministry was "You can't over-invest in young people." When church budgets were tight I always argued, sometimes unsuccessfully, for full funding for Sunday School and youth ministries. My passion for making a major investment in ministry to young people is based on Matthew 19:13-15.

It's a simple and straightforward story. But there's a background you need to know to catch its power. Little children, in the ancient world, were seen as almost sub-human. In a society where over 95 percent of the people were desperately poor, everyone was expected to do something to benefit the family. Little children couldn't do much and so were considered a burden. They couldn't add to the family resources but they did deplete them. They needed to be fed, clothed and otherwise cared for but at the expense of the labor of others. Until they became producers they were basically seen as parasites and if they died, well that just meant one less mouth to feed. Not that they didn't mourn, but their mourning was lessened by knowing that now there would be less stress on the family's resources. Children had little value and most people pretty much ignored them.

So in the story young children are brought to Jesus so he can pray for them. The disciples, true to the culture of the day tell them to "buzz off" but Jesus has a different reaction. He welcomes them and scolds the disciples for trying to run them off. But he does more than welcome them. He says little children are the model for what it means to be a part of the new movement he is creating. And then he puts his hand on the head of each child and gives each one his blessing.

If you have young children keep this story in mind. Invest your love and care in them. Introduce them to Jesus who loves them so much. More than anything else the spiritual shaping of young children happens in the home. And it's not only what you say, but also what you do and how you respond to life's victories and defeats that spiritually shapes your children. Someone once said, "Religion is more caught than taught." Parents ask yourselves, "What are my children "catching" from me." When God gave you children he gave you an awesome responsibility. Challenge yourselves to fulfill it.

And whether you have children or not, keep this in mind. Joy is being blessed with more and more children. And we need more adults to help us, as a church, to fulfill our part of spiritually shaping children. We need you: desperately. Will you help us? Will you love children that way Jesus loved children?

Prayer: Jesus help me to love children the way you do and to do whatever is necessary to invest myself in them so they can be shaped for a life of service to you. Amen.