

“Like a Child”
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Readings:

Matthew 18:1 – 5

Introduction

Careful the things you say children will listen

Careful the things you do children will see and learn

Guide them along the way,

Children will glisten

Children will look to you for which way to turn

To learn what to be

Careful before you say, listen to me.

Children will listen.

- These words come from the final song of *Into the Woods*, a musical by Stephen Sondheim.
- The song reminds parents that children absorb far more than we imagine.
 - They watch us, imitate us, and often become reflections of what they see.

- That makes perfect sense according to human logic.
 - Children learn from adults.
- But when Jesus speaks about the kingdom of heaven, he turns our logic upside down.
- If we translated Sondheim’s song into the language of Jesus, it might sound something like this:

Careful the things you say, children say it better;

Careful the things you do, children do them better.

Learn from them.

Let them guide you.

Careful before you say, listen to me.

Because you should be the one listening to them.

- In our text, the disciples ask Jesus a revealing question:

“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

- They are thinking about status, importance, and recognition.

- Jesus responds by placing a child in their midst and inviting them to rethink everything they believe about greatness.

1. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

- The disciples' question exposes a misunderstanding that appears throughout the Gospels.
- They still imagine the kingdom of God as a kingdom of power, influence, and position.
 - Even after the resurrection, they ask Jesus whether he will now restore the kingdom to Israel.
- Again and again, people seek greatness.
 - James and John wanted places of honor.
 - Herod built monuments to preserve his legacy.
 - Even Jesus is tempted with power in the wilderness and mocked on the cross with challenges to prove his greatness.
- The desire to be recognized is deeply human.
 - We pursue achievements, titles, influence, and success.
- In many ways, these things are not wrong.
 - They can be gifts from God.
- The problem comes when we assume that greatness is the foundation of life.
- Jesus teaches that the kingdom of heaven operates according to a different logic.

- In God's kingdom, greatness is not measured by how high we climb, but by how willing we are to humble ourselves.
- The disciples are looking upward, but Jesus points downward: to a child.
- The kingdom of heaven is not built upon self-exaltation. ○ It is built upon humility.

2. BE LIKE A CHILD

- At first, Jesus' command may sound warm and beautiful.
 - We often look back on childhood as a magical and carefree time.
 - But that is not what Jesus is doing.
- In the ancient world, children possessed no status, no authority, and no social importance.
 - They were not symbols of innocence;
 - They were symbols of insignificance.
- To become like a child was to give up claims to honor and prestige.
- But there is something even deeper.
 - Think for a moment about a time in your childhood when you faced a problem you could not solve.
 - Perhaps you were frightened, hurt, or lost.
 - What did you do?
 - You looked for someone bigger than yourself.
- Children live in dependence.

- They cannot feed themselves, protect themselves, or secure their own future.
- Their lives are entrusted to the care of others.
- This is the image Jesus places before the disciples.
 - To become like a child is not to become childish.
 - It is to recognize our dependence upon God.
 - It is to stop trusting in our accomplishments, our reputation, or our strength as the ultimate source of security.
- A child knows instinctively what adults often forget:
 - we were never meant to carry life alone.

3. THE GREATEST IS THE HUMBLE ONE

- The logic of the kingdom now becomes clear:
 - the smallest is the greatest.
 - Not because God wants us to despise ourselves.
 - Not because achievements are worthless.
 - Not because Christians should pretend they have no gifts or abilities.

- Rather, Jesus teaches that our ultimate confidence cannot rest in ourselves.
- The one who teaches this lesson most perfectly is Jesus himself.
 - Though he was God, he emptied himself and took the form of a servant.
 - The King became vulnerable.
 - The Lord became dependent.
 - The eternal Son entered the world as a mortal child.
- Humility is not self-hatred.
 - Humility is allowing God to do in us what we cannot do for ourselves.
- I learned something about this when I moved from Brazil to Canada.
 - Many foundations that had supported my identity, such as familiarity, relationships, language, and certainty, began to disappear.
 - One by one, those foundations crumbled.
- And when they did, I discovered something important.
 - God remained.
- Sometimes the barriers that make us feel secure also prevent us from fully trusting God.

- Becoming like a child means standing before the Father without defenses,
 - knowing that we are completely known and completely loved.

CONCLUSION

- I will conclude with a difficult and sad story.
 - But it's a story about the reality of life and our need to be like children.
- I'm sharing it with my friend's permission.
- A pastor friend of mine in Brazil experienced every parent's nightmare.
 - His youngest son, only one year old, choked on a peanut and tragically died in his arms.
- Days later, burdened with unimaginable grief, he asked his eight-year-old son how he was doing after what happened to his little brother.
 - "I'm fine," the boy replied.
- Surprised, the father asked,
 - "Do you have any questions about what happened?"
- The child thought for a moment and asked,
 - "Is my brother with God?"
 - "Yes," his father answered.
 - "Then he's fine too," the boy said.

- Perhaps, supported by our own achievements, greatness, power, knowledge, resources and foundations we would say:
 - he is just a child, he still doesn't understand what really happened.
- Perhaps Jesus would say:
 - be like this child,
 - because he is teaching you what it means to believe in the kingdom of heaven.
- In that moment of grief, the child understood something profound about the kingdom of heaven.
- He trusted God where human understanding could go no further.
- To face his worst nightmare, my friend had to learn to be like his son:
 - dependent on God.
- Amen.