

## Letting The Little Children Come To Jesus

I would like to dedicate our worship service today to our Sunday School teachers and Christian Preschool teachers.

For the next nine months they are going to be putting in a **lot** of time and effort so that children can learn about Jesus.

What they will be doing is precious in God's eyes.

As we heard in our Gospel lesson for today, children were very, very important to Jesus.

He took the little children in his arms, blessed them and instructed His disciples to let them come to Him so that He could find a place in their hearts.

He loves them and wants them to grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and He promises that if they do so, in their old age they will not depart from what they learned.

Sometimes kids who go to Sunday School and Preschool get a little mixed up on who was who and who did what in the Bible. Here are some answers they've given to test questions over the years:

1. *What is the First Commandment?* The First Commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
2. *Where did Moses lead the Israelites?* Moses died before he ever reached Canada. Then Joshua led the Hebrews in the Battle of Geritol.
3. *Who was Solomon?* Solomon was one of David's sons. He had 300 wives and 700 purcupines.
4. *How did Mary react when the angel told her she would give birth to the Savior of the world?* When Mary heard she was the mother of Jesus, she sang the Magna Carta.
5. *Name four of Paul's Epistles.* The Epistles were the wives of the Apostles. I don't know any of their names.

6. *What happened to Lot's wife?* Lot's wife was a pillar of salt during the day, but a ball of fire during the night.

And my favorite: *What do you know about St. Paul?*

"St. Paul cavorted to Christianity. He preached Holy Acrimony, which is another name for marriage."

Well, they don't always get it right, but they had the right idea!

(By the way, I feel compelled to add that NONE of these answers were supplied by any of the children who have been taught by Becky and Cheryl.)

All joking aside, It would be hard to name a more important ministry in the church than its ministry to children.

Repeatedly, studies have shown that the single most important factor in determining whether an adult has a saving faith in Jesus Christ is whether or not they were introduced to Jesus as a child.

Over 80% of all adult believers came to faith when they were children.

Of course with God, all things are possible, and there are people who have come to faith as adults—I'm a good example.

But exceptions only prove the rule, and the rule is that a child has a far better chance of having eternal life if he or she enters adulthood with a well-developed faith.

What does it take for a child to develop a strong faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?

Well, it takes two things. First of course they have to be born again.

In *John 3:7*, Jesus says to Nicodemus: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again...[of]...water and the Spirit."

When children are baptized, their sins are washed away and God sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in that child's heart as his lifelong guide and counselor.

His parents can't add anything to that, any more than they could add something to their child's body when he entered the world.

But once children have been born again, they need to be fed and cared for.

A newborn baby who isn't fed will die.

It's the same with a newborn child of God: if the child is not spiritually fed and cared for, the new life God gave him at his baptism will slowly drain out of him and he can never get to know Jesus.

So God has provided spiritual food for his newborn children so that they can grow and mature in their faith and have eternal life when they leave this world.

This food, this spiritual nourishment, is God's Word.

God's word is manna from heaven with which he feeds His people.

Children need to hear it preached and taught so that they can grow up in a faith that will keep them close to God and help them resist the temptations that the prince of this world will use to try to draw them away from their Savior.

Now the good news I have for you this morning is that God has made it easy for us to supply children with this nourishment they need.

He tells us in today's Gospel lesson: *"Let the little children come unto me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*

Notice He doesn't say, "**Send** the little children to me."

He says, "**Let** the little children come unto me."

The clear message is that children who have been born again through baptism WANT to come to Jesus.

They have a hunger for getting to know Jesus just like they have a hunger for fried chicken or ice cream.

And there are two places where this hunger they have for Jesus can be satisfied: at home and at church.

And let me be clear about this: the things parents do at home to help their child get to know Jesus—the devotions they have, the Bible stories

they read to them, the table grace they say before dinner and the prayers they say with them at bedtime—these are the most important and effective things that can be done—**because they come from the parents.**

But the church can also help satisfy this hunger—through Sunday School and Preschool.

God commissioned his church to do two things: preach the Gospel to all nations, and feed the sheep of His pasture—His children.

Sheep need to be fed—and so do lambs.

But the lambs can't get to church by themselves; they need the sheep to bring them.

One way of “letting the little children come to Jesus” is to bring them to church and a Christian preschool.

That is the job God has given Christian parents, and—to be blunt—woe to the parent who ignores this responsibility.

Jesus says very plainly: *“If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone around his neck.”*

A parent who ignores his responsibility to make sure his child is fed on God's Word is no different in God's eyes than a parent who withholds food from his child.

Raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is a vital part of a Christian parent's responsibility.

But there's a wonderful promise attached to this responsibility.

Jesus also said, *“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”*

Christian parents, Sunday School teachers and Christian Preschool teachers welcome God into children's lives.

They extend God's hospitality to children.

As they welcome God into a child's life, they are welcoming the Lord Himself into that child's home.

In 30 years of ministry I have seen more than one parent converted to Jesus Christ by observing the joy and excitement their child exhibits after coming home from Sunday School or a Vacation Bible School.

George Barna, a widely respected authority on the religious practices of Americans, reports that the probability of someone coming to faith in Jesus Christ is **five times** greater for those who are taught about Jesus between the ages of 5 and 12 as it is for people 13 or over.

As Jesus said, "...the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

At no time in their life will a person be more receptive to the message of salvation than when they are young.

That is why ministry to our children may be the single most important ministry the church has.

As Barna writes, "Children are where the kingdom action takes place."

Adults who have survived accidents that left them with severe physical limitations, tend to fall into two groups.

People in one group turn bitter over the loss of physical wholeness and can even become angry at God for not being there in their time of need.

People in the other group tend to see God's hand at work, sparing them from a premature death while challenging them to enjoy and experience life in a new way.

As you might guess, a large percentage of the people in the first group have no relationship with Jesus Christ, while a large percentage of those in the second group do have a relationship with Him

Identical experiences, opposite reactions—depending entirely upon whether or not one knows Jesus.

A person who knows Jesus can live with hope and joyful anticipation; a person who is a stranger to Jesus has difficulty finding either.

And the best time for it to start is during childhood.

We tend to think of life as a process of learning.

Of acquiring knowledge through schooling and experience and then applying it to our lives.

We think that knowledge gives us wisdom.

But the Bible defines wisdom in a very different way.

Wisdom—true wisdom—doesn't come from worldly knowledge.

Wisdom comes from God.

In *Proverb Number 8*, Wisdom is a person who calls out: "The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began...I was given birth....Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me....For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death."

The wisdom that comes from God is not a "what" but a Who: God's Wisdom is Jesus Christ, Who was begotten before God created the universe and Who brings God's favor and eternal life to those who **listen** to Him.

In the words of St. Paul, "Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God."

We can strive to give our children all the advantages the world has to offer—excellent schools, inspiring coaches, safe homes and a college education.

But unless we help them develop a relationship with Jesus Christ, it may all be for nought.

Bringing children to church and to Sunday School or sending them to a Christian Preschool is the most important, the most valuable and the most wonderful gift you can ever give them!

Then, when they are grown up, they can sing with all their heart: "Jesus loves me, this I know; Cause the Bible tells me so; Little ones to Him belong; They are weak but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me; Yes Jesus loves me; Yes, Jesus loves me: the Bible tells me so.

Amen.

Father in Heaven.

We thank you for all of your blessings—of life and health and our church and our country.

But today we thank you especially for our teachers—those who teach in our Sunday School and those who teach in our Christian Preschool which will open its doors this Tuesday.

Bless them all with enthusiasm and joy in their teaching and let the love they have for their Savior prepare the hearts of children to receive the same love.