**Sunday 10th May 2020**

**Glynde Lutheran Church**

**Sermon on Mark 10:13-16**

**Theme: “Jesus blesses the little children”**

**“GROWING YOUNG (2): Blessing the young”**

***Introduction:***

Can I begin by telling you that I’m missing worshipping together with you? I miss our Sunday worship time together with God, and I miss being together here in this church…. As well, I miss chatting to you, and I miss seeing our community interacting with one another, and I miss seeing the children running around and playing together….

If a visitor were to come to worship with us in the past, what do you think he or she would particularly notice? Well, at the 10.30 a.m. service, it would be the number of children present: children gathered together at the back drawing and reading and playing, children racing up to Children’s Time, and children running out to Lighthouse ministry….

***Part 1: Jesus and the little children***

And this is how, I believe, Jesus wants it to be…. As we can see from our Bible reading, Jesus encouraged people bringing their children to him to be blessed by him, enjoyed being in the company of children, and promoted children as examples to us of what life in God’s Kingdom involves.

Listen again to what Mark tells us happened:

**Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people** *(Lit. “rebuked them”).* **When Jesus noticed this, he was angry** *(Lit. “indignant****”),* and said to his disciples, “Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these”** *(Lit. “for of such of these is the Kingdom of God”).* **I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it”. Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them** *(Mark 10:13-16).*

What’s the first thing that you notice here?

I think the first thing that stands out here is that Jesus loved and valued children, and that he enjoyed being in their presence. You know, in Jesus’ day in Judaea, children weren’t highly valued: they weren’t seen as being equal to adults, and “at best childhood was seen as a training ground for adulthood, not a significant stage of life itself” *(Growing Young, p. 219).*

The disciples’ attitude to parents bringing their young children to be blessed by Jesus reflects this attitude of Jewish society to children. Mark tells us that people were bringing “little children” *(Greek “paidia”)* to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. The disciples probably thought, “Not more children!

Jesus needs his space to minister to the more important matters, more important people”. So the disciples spoke sternly to the parents for bringing their children to Jesus and bothering the busy Jesus.

This aroused Jesus’ attention, and annoys him to say the least. Listen again to what he says in response:

**“Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these”** *(Lit. “for of such of these is the Kingdom of God”).* **I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it”.**

And then Jesus picks up the little children, puts them in his arms, and blesses them….

This is not the first time in the Gospels that Jesus shows us how much he loves and values children, *and, through him, how much God loves and values children.* Earlier on in Mark’s gospel, we hear how Jesus went out of his way to heal children: there’s Jairus’ daughter, *who he brings back to life,* the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter whom he heals, and the boy with an evil spirit *whose demon is driven out of him by Jesus (Mark 5:21-43; 7:24-30; 9:14-29).* And we also hear in Mark’s gospel how Jesus earlier took a child in his arms and affirmed how valuable children are in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said to his disciples then:

**“Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me…”** *(Mark 9:37).*

William Barclay in his commentary on our passage for today emphasises that our Bible passage tells us quite a lot about Jesus. He writes:

**Incidentally, this tells us a great deal about Jesus. It tells us that he was the kind of person who cared for children and for whom children cared. He could not have been a stern and gloomy and joyless person. There must have been a kindly sunshine on him. He must have smiled easily and laughed joyously.**

**Somewhere George MacDonald says that he does not believe in a *person’s* Christianity if the children are never found playing around his door. This little, precious incident throws a flood of light on the human kind of person Jesus was** *(Mark, p. 241-242).*

Well anyway, the first thing that stands out here in our Bible reading is that Jesus loved and valued children, and that he enjoyed being in their presence….

But there is another thing that stands out here in our Bible reading: namely, the fact that Jesus puts forward the little children as examples of what living in the Kingdom of God involves. Listen again to what Jesus says:

**“Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these”** *(Lit. “for of such of these is the Kingdom of God”).* **I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it”.**

What is it about “little children” that Jesus is wanting us to notice and uphold? Surely, it is their humility and their willing to trust. These are essential aspects of living in God’s Kingdom, *of being a child of God:* being humble before God, and trusting in what He provides… *(cf. Luke 18:9-14).*

In fact, with regard to that earlier instance in Mark’s gospel where Jesus took a child in his arms, Matthew tells us that Jesus said:

**“The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child”** *(Matthew 18:4).*

In the book *Growing Young* which we are looking at over these four weeks in May, the writers have this to say about our passage for today where Jesus blesses the young children:

**Theologically, we stand on solid ground when we prioritize young people everywhere in our congregation. Jesus led the way for us in his shocking attention to children and his reorientation of the community around them. It was a *disproportional* prioritization** *(p. 220-221).*

And then they finish off by saying:

**What would it look like if your church took the same approach to children, teenagers, and young adults today?** *(p. 221).*

Well, let’s think for a while about this using some of the thoughts that the *Growing Young* writers bring up:

***Part 2: Deeper reflection***

As I said last week, the *Growing Young* authors focus on six core commitments of Churches who want to grow young, *in other words churches who want to foster having young people in their midst, and who want to grow the faith of their young people.* These six core commitment are given on their summary diagram, which you can see on the Powerpoint slide*.*

Last week on the basis of Luke’s account of Jesus being lost in the Temple in Jerusalem at the age of 12 years old, we focused on two of these six core commitments, *commitments that flowed from our reflection on how Jesus would have been cared for the Jewish community in Jerusalem, namely the commitments:*

* **Empathise with today’s young people**
* **Fuel a warm community**

This week we are going to focus on two more of these core commitments, *again commitments which flow from our Bible reading for this morning about Jesus blessing the little children, namely the commitments:*

* **Take Jesus’ message seriously**
* **Priorise young people (and families) everywhere**

Jesus certainly encouraged his followers to take his message seriously…. Listen to some of the things that Jesus said about his message and taking it seriously:

* **“So then,** **anyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a like a wise man** **who built his house on rock.**   The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed, and the wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock.

**But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.** The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed, the wind blew hard against that house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!” *(Matt. 7:24-27).*

* **“I have been given all authority in heaven and earth.** Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptise them in to the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age” *(Matt. 28:18-20).*
* **“I am the bread of life”,** Jesus told them. **“He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never be thirsty”***(John 6:35).*
* Thomas said to Jesus, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?”

Jesus answered him, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me”** *(John 14:5-6).*

And when you take Jesus’ message seriously, you listen to him as your Lord, and you do what he wants you to do…. And what is one thing that Jesus very much wants us to do: to love and value little ones and young people everywhere, and to prioritise young people *and families* everywhere.

Listen to some of the things that the writers of the book *Growing Young* have to say about these two core commitments:

**\*In churches growing young, Jesus reigns over poor theology, and his words ring true for young sojourners hungry for life-giving direction** *(p. 129).*

* Nearly everyone we interviewed – young and old – repeated, **“People are our heart; Jesus is our message”** *(p. 129).*
* **“Pursuing Jesus…is the heart of churches growing young”** *(p. 130).*
* **Churches growing have “more talk about Jesus”, more focus on the redemption narrative, and more talk about life today** *(p. 136).*
* **Regardless of your context, our research has us convinced that the hinge point separating churches that grow old from those that grow young is priority.** We call this a hinge point because… if *churches* fail to prioritise young people everywhere and help them to live as good neighbours in the world, over time the congregation will age out *(cf. Growing Old arrow at the junction between warmth and priority on the diagram, p. 200).*
* **How do churches that grow young make *little ones,* youth, and emerging adults a greater priority? When they think about budget strategy, worship planning, programming, community life, theology, and all other aspects of church life, they think about young people. They intentionally pay attention** *(p. 202).*

So…?? Are you and I taking Jesus’ message seriously *and loving and valuing little ones and young people in our church family*, and are we prioritizing young people and families in our ministry here at Glynde? And what are we doing and what could we be doing in these areas?

Like I did last week, let me suggest a few things that we could be doing, *and maybe you are doing:*

* **Foster the faith of the young people in your family circle or your circle of friends** *(e.g. Read The Beginner’s Bible to your children; watch The Story of Jesus for Young Children DVD together)*
* **Explore passages of Scripture with children at church and at home, passages which invite young people to follow Jesus** *(e.g., Jesus and the children, Jesus’ love and compassion for the leper).*
* **Share testimonies by adults and emerging adults in worship to encourage young people to follow Jesus**
* **Mentor a young person,** *in other words, be a midwife to the birth of the faith of a young person (p. 159).*
* **Priortise ministry to young people and families, and partner with families in the faith formation of their children** *(e.g. Growing Faith at Home in THE SUNDAY PAPER; give families resources for Church@Home).*
* **Better equip parents for life and caring for their children** *(e.g. Parenting courses).*
* **Ask the simple question of all aspects of ministry here at Glynde: “How could young people be part of this ministry?”** *(e.g., music, bible reading prayer, children’s address, Junior Youth planning)*

These are just some of the ways in which we can love and value the young people in our midst, and to prioritise ministry to young people and families….

***Conclusion:***

Let’s finish up…. I love this account in Mark’s Gospel of the way that Jesus loved and cared for the little ones who had been brought to Jesus, in order to be blessed by him.

That’s what I believe God wants us to do as individuals and as a church family here at Glynde: to love and care for the little ones among us, and to prioritise the formation of their faith in Jesus.

May God bless us as we focus on doing this!