

**Mark 10:13-16**

A man had put up a sign: “Puppies for Sale.” A small boy came by to see them. The man whistled and a big dog and four puppies came running, followed by a fifth puppy that limped. The boy spotted the lame puppy and asked, “What’s wrong with him?” The man explained that the puppy had been born with no hip socket. “The puppy will live,” he said, “but he’ll never be much of a dog.” “That’s the one I want,” said the boy, “I’ll give you a dollar now and pay you fifty cents a month.” The man shook his head. “No, we’ll make a deal, but you don’t want that dog. He’ll never be able to run and jump and play with you.” The little boy didn’t answer, but he pulled up his pants leg. There was a steel brace running up both sides of his leg. The boy smiled, “You know, I don’t run so well myself, and he’ll be needing somebody to understand him and love him.”

That’s why Jesus came. We poor sinners, crippled by our sins, needed someone to come to our aid—to love us, to forgive us, to save us from our sins. Jesus was that “someone.” And the mothers and fathers in our text, who were bringing their little ones to Him, were grateful that His arms were open to them and their children. And because Jesus’ disciples were trying to stop them, Jesus became angry. The disciples were shooing the people with their children away, but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me!”

Looking at Jesus’ words and actions here, we get a pretty good idea of what makes God angry, and what gives Him joy. He became angry when the Twelve prevented the little ones from coming to Him. Last week in the news there was a story about a young girl who died. But her death could have been prevented. She had received a head injury and became very sick as a result, but her parents did not seek medical help. They did not call a doctor. They did not take their daughter to a hospital.

We hear this and are saddened by it, and yet we are guilty of much worse. Our children are born with a fatal disease—sin and its consequences. They need spiritual help. They need baptism. They need to be brought to Jesus at the font for the blessings of life, forgiveness, and salvation that He gives there. They need to be brought to Jesus daily in the home through devotions and prayer. They need to be brought to Jesus weekly in His House.

If Jesus became angry at His disciples for keeping the little ones away from Him, don’t you think that makes Him just as angry today? We deserve that anger. We have earned it by our spiritual laziness; by the way that we keep ourselves and others away from the Savior.

Thank God that He says, “His anger lasts only for a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime.” If preventing little ones from coming to Jesus makes Him angry, then it is also true that His greatest joy is in giving grace and forgiveness to poor sinners like us.

Jesus took those children into His arms and blessed them. One of our greatest joys is in the giving of gifts—giving gifts to each other, giving gifts to children at Christmas and watching their eyes light up. That is God’s greatest joy, too—giving His gifts to us, not because we have earned them, but because He delights in giving.

As we heard in our Collect for today: “O God, whose almighty power is made known chiefly in showing mercy and pity...” That little boy didn’t want just any puppy. He wanted the puppy that was crippled. That’s the one he chose to love. And that’s why God

loves you—because His greatest joy is in showing mercy and pity to sinners like you and me.

A great truth of the Christian Faith is what Jesus teaches in our text: “You must become like a little child,” He says “in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” We could say it like this: You must become like a crippled puppy—helpless, weak, pitiful. The difference between you and a little child is that little children are helpless, and you are not. But to enter God’s Kingdom, you must become like a little child. You must see yourself as helpless and weak.

Children don’t earn their way into the world...they are born into the world. Babies don’t fend for themselves...they are taken care of by parents who feed them, clothe them, bathe them, and love them. That little boy did not choose the healthy puppies. He chose the puppy that needed help. If you have a strong, healthy, “take-care-of-myself” attitude before God, then you will never enter His Kingdom. But if, like a child, you see your need for forgiveness and mercy from God, then, like that puppy, you are His choice.

Children don’t enter God’s Kingdom because they are more innocent than adults. It’s not because they sin less than adults do. Baby’s hearts are just as sinful as the hearts of adults. Even in the womb, babies are just as sinful as everyone else. When they are born, little children are some of the most selfish people on earth—always wanting, not later, but now! No, it’s not because of any innocence on their part that children enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Children enter God’s Kingdom the same way adults do—by the grace of God in Christ Jesus...God’s grace poured on us in Holy Baptism...God’s grace given us in Word and Sacrament. “It is by grace you are saved, through faith...” Children do not “birth” themselves into the world. Mothers give birth to them. They are acted upon. They are recipients of shelter and nourishment while in the womb, and they are brought into the world by their mothers. The child is not the one in control, the mother is.

And that is what makes a Christian...what makes a child of God—receiving His mercy and love, just as children do from their mothers; receiving entrance into His Kingdom by grace; being one “given to,” not the one in charge. All of you must become like little children—recipients of God’s grace; helpless, weak, and pitiful before Him...but loved by Him, and forgiven by Him for Jesus’ sake.

And that is what you are: children, God’s baptized children in Jesus Christ. You did not choose to be born, and you did not choose to enter God’s Kingdom. He caused your physical birth, and He brought you into His Kingdom. Through your Mother, the Church, God gave you birth through water and Word.

And here you are today in God’s House, singing His praises, listening to His Word...and let’s remember that we always are, and remain, like little children—weak, helpless to save ourselves, totally dependant upon God for everything.

You see, God doesn’t love you because of what you do for Him. He doesn’t love you because you bring your children to Jesus. God loves you because you are crippled with sin; because you have problems in life; because of your weaknesses and failings. And He has

pity on you. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to become crippled with your sin. Jesus was too weak to carry His cross up Calvary's hill because He was carrying your sins. Jesus became helpless for you. He became a pitiful, bloody figure for you. Jesus took your sins. He took your spiritual laziness. He took your failures. And He took God's anger against you—all of it. God became angry at His Son in your place, and now He has only joy over you. Joy in giving you the gifts Jesus purchased for you and your children by His sufferings, death, and resurrection.

Do you see? You are God's forgiven child not because of what you do, but because of what you can't do—what Jesus did for you—because like a little helpless child, you depend upon Him for all of your needs; because even though you can't love Him perfectly, He has perfect love for you; even though you are helpless to save yourself, He saves you in Christ. And even though your sin, and my sin, cripples us so that we are always making a mess of our lives, God loves you and forgives you more and more.

The best thing that happened to that lame puppy is that the little boy loved him, not in spite of his crippled body, but because of it. God loves you, friend, because you are a poor crippled sinner. And that is what you will be your entire life. But as that puppy's life was changed because of the boy who had pity on him, so your life is now one of joy because of your Savior's joy over you; because he opens His arms to you, and like a child, He receives you and loves you, and He forgives you. And that will never change, no matter how crippling your life becomes; no matter how weak and helpless you may be. And that's why the Kingdom of Heaven is yours...because God has no greater joy than in giving His gifts of the Kingdom to you through Jesus Christ. Amen.