

Are there times when you think about your childhood and wish you could relive those days? Can you recall the days of laughter and joy that you experienced with your friends and family? In a short passage today, we heard that Jesus not only wants us to remember those times, but also to relive them and to be like the child we once were.

We will fully understand the almost poignant beauty of this passage with Jesus and the children best if we remember when it happened. Jesus was on the way to the Cross—and he knew it. Its cruel shadow can never have been far from his mind. It was at such a time that he had time for the children. Even with such a tension in his mind as that he had time to take them in his arms and he had the heart to smile into their faces and maybe to play with them awhile.

The disciples were not boorish and ungracious men. They simply wanted to protect Jesus. They did not quite know what was going on, but they knew quite clearly that tragedy lay ahead and they could see the tension under which Jesus labored. They did not want him to be bothered. They could not conceive that he could want the children about him at such a time as that. But Jesus said, " Let the children come to me."

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. This little, precious incident throws light on the human kind of person Jesus was.

“Let the little children come to me. . . for it is to such as these,” said Jesus “that the Kingdom of God belongs.” What is it about the child that Jesus liked and valued so much? Well, Katherine and I had several opportunities this summer to witness first-hand in our 4-year-old granddaughter Elli many of the traits Jesus found worthy of the Kingdom of God. And, of course, some not so worthy. But who remembers those?

So, let’s put a name on some of those characteristics:

1. A child has humility. Ordinarily the child is embarrassed to be noticed and called out. She has not yet learned to think in terms of place and pride and prestige. She has not yet learned to discover the importance of herself. She can be very shy at times.
2. A child is obedient. True, a child is often disobedient, but paradox though it may seem, her natural instinct is to obey. She has not yet learned the pride and the false independence which separate a person from others and from God.

There were several times this summer when our granddaughter would “lose it” and scream because she did not get her way. After a few minutes of theatrics, she came back to us as docile as a little lamb and continued her activity.

3. A child has trust. That is seen in two things.

- i) Trust is seen in the child's acceptance of authority. There is a time, admittedly quite a short time time, when he thinks his father and mother knows everything and that his parents are always right. Instinctively the child realizes his own ignorance and his own helplessness and trusts the one who, as he thinks, knows.

With Elli this summer, when it was time for her to go to pre-school, she would climb up into her car seat when asked to do so by 'Grammy" and she would wait patiently for Katherine to buckle her in. No fuss and no questions asked.

- ii) Trust is seen in the child's confidence in other people. She does not expect any person to be bad. She will make friends with a perfect stranger. The child has not yet learned to suspect the world. She still believes the best about others. Sometimes that very trust leads her into danger for there are those who are totally unworthy of it and who abuse it, but that trust is a lovely thing.

4. A child wants to please. One of my favorite photos of all time is one Katherine took this summer. I was sitting at the kitchen counter working on a sermon. Little Elli climbed up on the stool next to me and watched for a while, as I read portions of scripture and then passages from a Bible Commentary. The picture captures the moment Elli put her

finger on a page in the Commentary and looked at me as though I had missed the most important point and needed to include it in my work. Understand, please, that Elli cannot read, but she knew instinctively, that I needed her assistance!

5. The child has a short memory. He or she has not yet learned to bear grudges and nourish bitterness. Even when they are unjustly treated—and who among us has not sometimes been unjust to our children? The child forgets and forgets so completely that she does not even need to forgive.

Indeed, of such is the Kingdom of God. And what did Jesus say of the need for his followers to adopt these childish traits? His words were clear: “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

We often think it is the mature and discerning adult that can respond to Jesus’ call to us to be better Christians, to discover how we can help shape the place in which we live into a place that resembles the kingdom of God. Yet, as adults we are often so set in our ways and our attitudes that we cannot hear or perhaps even be open to Christ’s simple message of living and loving other people in harmony and as our brothers and sisters. Our maturity becomes a barrier rather a lens through which we see the real Jesus and our real selves.

In this brief story we shared today, Jesus reminds us that it is in our vulnerable, trusting and obedient moments that we are truly open to him and to his call.

As we go about our activities in the coming week may we be childlike in the presence of Jesus. May we feel his embrace as he takes us in his arms. And may we listen to the words of blessing he has only for each of us.