





Theme: Jesus, Kindness, and the Kingdom of God ***“A Kingdom for Lilliputians”***

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹⁴ But Jesus said, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.” – Matthew 19:14

Monday, June 13 – Read Matthew 19:13-15. (Mr.) Fred Rogers said, “I think the best thing we can do is to let people know that each one of them is precious.” Jesus, inviting children to come to him, spoke volumes to the adults who were bringing their children to him, and to the children themselves. We must realize that first-century culture did not value children. Children, along with women, old men, and slaves, were viewed as physically weak burdens on society who had little value to the wider life of the community. Jesus consistently used words that uplifted the marginalized and corrected those who thought too highly of themselves.

 Valuing children is more than cute photos and fuzzy emotions. Children are more treasured today than in the first century but caring for children often isn’t as valued as we would like to think in today’s world. Child-care workers and teacher are frequently poorly paid, and the work is often considered a low-status profession. Parents who leave the workforce to care for children lose income but sometimes even more: a sense of identity, a relationship network, and even a feeling of worth. What if we valued caring for children the way Jesus did?


 *The Message* version of the Bible rendered Jesus’ forceful words as: “Don’t push these children away. Don’t ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless you accept God’s kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you’ll never get in.” What aspects of childlikeness do you most need to be more open to God’s Kingdom? How could those childlike qualities deepen and enrich your relationship with God?


Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I need you to hug me and bless me. And I need your spirit to fill me, guiding me to bless even the smallest people who need me to show them your love and kindness. Amen.*

Tuesday, June 14 – Read Romans 8:12-25. Paul had used images from criminal law, from accounting, from sacrifice, even from slavery. Now he turned to the family realm to picture the

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essence of the community God's grace is creating. God has adopted us, he said. As God's adopted sons and daughters, we are heirs along with Christ. Even in "present suffering," we live in hope. Paul understood, in verses 24-25, that the essential quality of hope is that it is oriented to something in the future that one expects but does not yet possess.


 When Paul wrote, "We were saved in hope," he didn't glibly mean "Buck up." John Stott wrote in his commentary, *The Message of Romans*, "Paul is not stating a... superficial optimism that everything tends to everybody's good in the end. No, if the 'good' which is God's objective is our completed salvation, then its beneficiaries are his people who are described as those who love him." How can you base your hope, not in vague optimism, but in the faithfulness of the Savior who's always loved you and who you've learned to love?

 In verse 15, Paul contrasted "a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear" with God's loving adoption of us as sons and daughters. What factors have shaped your view of God as either a person you serve out of fear, or as a loving father who wants what is best for you? If your life experience left negative overtones around the word "father," what other images and relationships help you fully trust that God loves you?

Prayer: *God, I'm filled with awe that you really want me as a member of your family, as one of your beloved "kids." Help me to live in love and gratitude as a loyal family member. Amen.*

Wednesday, June 15 – Read 1 Samuel 3:6-11, Mark 10:13-16, and 1 Timothy 4:12. Samuel's mother offered him to God's service from birth in [1 Samuel 1:20-28](#). While he was still a boy, God called to him in an unusual way. Samuel didn't know what to make of it at first, but the older priest Eli sensed that God was up to something. So, Samuel listened to God—and kept on for the rest of his life. Jesus loved children, and children loved him. Mark said Jesus was angry with his stern, "grown up" disciples. He welcomed the children, and Mark added the lovely detail that Jesus "hugged the children and blessed them." And the apostle Paul uplifted young Timothy in his pastoral work.


 If we read on in [1 Samuel 3:11-18](#), we find that Samuel heard a message of divine judgment on Eli's wicked sons, who immorally exploited their priestly position. It saddened and frightened Samuel, but he honestly told Eli the message. One vital key to hearing God (even inwardly) is being willing to take God seriously, to do what he commands. Can you recall a time when you needed to set aside your own plan(s) or wishes to follow what God wanted?


 When Jesus spoke about children, in the ancient world emphasis would fall on the child's lack of status. This requires a change of heart and life, away from concerns with prestige and status. What aspects of childlikeness and youth did Jesus' enemies most need to be able to enter God's Kingdom? Are there any of those aspects that you, too, want to ask God to help grow in your life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, please keep me from ever growing too old inside to welcome and uplift the joyous, trusting circle of children you welcomed. Keep my heart fresh, flexible, and smiling as I follow you. Amen.*

Thursday, June 16 – Read Galatians 3:26-29. After the Apostle Paul's teaching in Galatia, Jewish-Christian teachers "from James," which we know were from Jerusalem in [Galatians 2:12](#), were undermining Paul's message and effectiveness. They said a person's standing before God was based on obeying the law (particularly, male circumcision). They divided people by ethnic and


religious heritage, insisting that God could only accept Gentiles if they adopted Hebrew cultural and religious rituals.


 The idea of all being God’s children was revolutionary in contrast to what some were teaching the Galatians. David Benner, a psychologist, and author of *The Gift of Being Yourself*, says, “an identity grounded in God would mean that when we think of who we are, the first thing that would come to mind is our status as someone who is deeply loved by God.” How would viewing yourself this way change the way you live? What are some obstacles to doing so?

 In Galatians 3:28, Paul said Christ overcomes “all ethnic barriers,” when he says neither Jew nor Greek; all social barriers, when he says neither slave nor free, and all gender barriers, when he says neither male nor female. When we say that Christ has dissolved these distinctions, we do not mean that they do not exist, but that they do no longer matter the way we use them as humans to put people in boxes. We’re all sinners at the foot of the cross. We’re all saved by the grace of the one God. What steps can you take to extend grace to those who are different from you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for redeeming and forgiving me, and making me a child of God. Keep transforming me in Christ. Help me pursue unity in Christ with people like me and people who are distinct from me. Amen*


Friday, June 17 – Read Luke 15:11-24. (Mr.) Fred Rogers told a reporter, “I don't think anybody can grow unless he really is accepted exactly as he is.” Jesus' story vividly pictured a selfish, naïve young man who rashly used up his resources. Only then did he come “to his senses,” in verse 17. His father watched for him, not to scold but to welcome him home: “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion.” The father’s accepting love embraced him with robe, ring, sandals, and the fattened calf, saying, “This son of mine...was lost and is found!”

 Scholar N. T. Wright noted in his commentary *Luke for Everyone* that, “in a culture where senior figures are far too dignified to run anywhere, this man takes to his heels as soon as he sees his young son dragging himself home.” This is one of Jesus' great pictures of what God is truly like. Do you picture God intimidating, looking down on you sternly? Or do you see him as a loving parent always eager to run to you and throw his arms around you?

 Our culture wants children to “grow up and leave home.” But Wright also wrote that in Jesus' day, this was a story of shameful behavior, “with the younger son abandoning his obligation to care for his father in his old age.” Have you ever been like the younger son in Jesus' story, eager to leave the constraints of family and faith behind? What, if anything, brought you to your senses to turn homeward to your heavenly father?

Prayer: *Lord God, sometimes I'm careless, sometimes I'm stubborn. Keep bringing me “to my senses,” making me willing to come home to you, again and again. Amen.*

Saturday, June 18 – Read Mark 1:9-11 again. Mark’s concise, action-oriented gospel gave a simple account of Jesus' baptism. The reference to the “heaven splitting open” may well have been a subtle way to say that Jesus made the wish expressed to God in [Isaiah 64:1-2](#) a reality. None of the gospels said anyone but Jesus heard the voice at his baptism, unlike the incident in [John 12:27-29](#). This was likely an inner experience of God confirming Jesus' calling and mission.

 The baptism set the stage for Jesus' whole ministry. In the words from heaven, discerning readers heard echoes of [Psalm 2:7](#) (a “royal psalm” New Testament Christians applied to

Jesus) and [Isaiah 42:1](#), a “servant song” Jesus said shaped his mission. When were you baptized? How has that shaped your life?



Scholar N. T. Wright commented on “heaven splitting open,” in his commentary, *Mark for Everyone*; “It doesn’t mean that Jesus saw a little door ajar miles up in the sky. ‘Heaven’ in the Bible often means God’s dimension behind ordinary reality...A good deal of Christian faith is a matter of learning to live by this different reality even when we can’t see it.” What has helped you learn to live by the reality of God’s dimension behind the ordinary in day-to-day life?

Prayer: *Lord God, many times I’ve wished you’d part the clouds and show me the reality of your person and rule. Help me grasp Mark’s message—that in Jesus that’s exactly what you did. Amen.*