

I can't imagine there is anyone who hasn't seen
a sweet picture of Jesus surrounded by children...

Of course, there were no camera's way back then...
and there aren't even any paintings that we have found so far
from that ancient time...
so all of our pictures are greatly influenced by our own time and culture.

Just google "Jesus and the children" and you get paintings and sketchings from
all different time periods from all different cultures...
and all of them tug at our hearts...

But that is because we are modern day people,
who at least give lip service to loving children...
although when I see government budgets and
when I see corporations marketing to children,
it does cause me to question our "love" of children...
But that is a topic for another day...

The ancient people were at least upfront about how they felt about children:
John Pilch, biblical scholar and author shared this information in his book:
[The Cultural World of Jesus](#).

In antiquity, childhood was a time of terror.

Infant mortality rates sometimes reached 30%, and of those who survived,
60% were dead by the age of 16.

Within the family and the community, the child had next to no status.

A minor child was considered equal to a slave.

Only after reaching maturity did a child become a free person with
rights to inherit the family estate.

During a famine, children would be fed last after the adults.

In the Hebrew books of Proverbs and Sirach, fathers are exhorted to punish their sons physically because they were considered basically evil and need strong correction

Children were wanted because they provided family continuity, valuable labor in the family business.

As a bit of a sidebar, in the middle ages the great theologian, Thomas Aquinas taught that in a raging fire a husband was obliged to save his father first, then his mother, next his wife, and last of all his young children.

So, the sweet image of childhood that we often connect to, hasn't always been that way...

**So what was Jesus about when he took the child in his arms and said:
“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me, but the one who sent me.?”**

Is Jesus simply trying to change people's attitudes back then about the beauty and innocence of childhood?

Not really:

Jesus wasn't into just changing rules or making people nicer or sweeter...

Jesus was into the big stuff:

He was into changing how we understood and related to ALL of life...

He was into changing how we understood and related to the Holy Presence of Yahweh!

For Jesus, there was this transparency of Reality that allowed Divinity to shine through, IF one had the eyes and the heart to see....

For Jesus, all of creation was sacred and holy.

All of creation was vibrantly alive with the presence of Yahweh.

All of reality was a doorway to Divinity.

**We all know that for Jesus it wasn't a simple matter of following the rules
or the customs of the his day,**

but he kept opening wider and wider the circles of compassion, love, and forgiveness.

He wanted people to see with the eyes of love.

to hear with the ears of compassion

To love with the heart of his Father....

This required a whole new consciousness...

it required a larger, higher, broader way of understanding reality.

Welcoming the little child, wasn't just being sweet to a defenseless little one...

it was recognizing the Holy One in their midst

in this instance...the Holy was there in the presence of a child ...

So, how do we live this understanding in our lives today...

If Jesus was among us now, would he still use a little child?

**Perhaps, because we still have a long way to go in our
understanding and treatment of EVERYONE'S children as holy**

Perhaps if Jesus was to do the same today,

he would wrap his arms around the homeless guy on south Ashland...

or perhaps he would wrap his arms around a refugee from Syria

or the mother with 6 children having dinner in the homeless shelter

or even a river polluted from toxic waste or the forest that was clear cut....

**The shift of consciousness that Jesus was inviting everyone too
was a shift that saw that there is no dividing line between the sacred and the secular...
Everywhere was holy...Everyone was the presence of Divinity...
Everything could open our hearts to unboundaried presence of Mercy, Compassion,
Forgiveness and Love among us...**

**Let's pause for a moment....
and think of one group of people that you struggle with...
like those people on welfare,
or the homeless....
or the migrants...
Or perhaps you might imagine one place devastated and polluted**

These people are your entry point for divinity...for the holy...for the presence of God.

**Shocking? Yes...but this is the power of this reading...
Those people watching Jesus put his arms around the child and telling them
that if they welcome the child, they welcome him and not only do they welcome
him, they welcome Yahweh: the King of the Universe was shocking...**

many, most of them couldn't handle it...

**Return now to those you choose to ignore...
here is our invitation to see them with different eyes...
here is our opportunity for a breakthrough into kingdom consciousness...**

**As always...the question is: Are we willing to see differently?
Are we willing to see with the Heart of Love? with the Heart of the Holy?**

Do you want your answer might be?

Amen.