

Mark 9:33-37

**Then they came to Capernaum;
and when he was in the house he asked them:
“What were you arguing about on the way?”
But they were silent,
for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.**

**He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them:
“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”
Then he took a little child and put it among them;
and taking it in his arms, he said to them:**

**“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me
welcomes not me
but the one who sent me.”**

Meditation:

“How are the children?”

In certain villages in Africa that is the greeting that is extended among adults rather than saying hello.

How are the children?

**The belief is, if the children are doing well,
the whole village is doing well...**

Like many of you, children hold a very special and important place in my heart and in my life.

Most people, in the U.S., would say the same thing.

Even many of our politicians look for photo opportunities to be seen with babies and/or children because there is an unconscious belief that if you like kids, you must be a decent human being..

As Americans, we claim to value children.

well...at least that is what we say...

But in the time of Jesus,

children didn't matter in the same way that they matter today.

In antiquity, a young child was considered to be equal to a slave.

Only when the child reached maturity was that child considered

a free person who could inherit the family estate.

Children were loved because they provided a type of 'social security'... They would maintain the family business and they would care for the elders.

If they survived into adulthood they would assure that the family lineage would continue.

Thomas Aquinas who was a great theologian in the Middle Ages put it this way:

If the house was engulfed in a raging fire,
the husband was obliged to save his father first,
then his mother,
then his wife and last of all his young children.

If a famine came upon the land,
the adults were to be fed first, the youngest fed last.

Considering those facts,
it is startling that Jesus uses a young child
to make his point with his arguing, status seeking apostles! =

This wasn't at all about being nice or polite.

And it was all about giving because you could expect to be repaid.

Consequently, no one HAD to offer a child or a servant hospitality because there would be no way they could pay you back...

So why bother?

Hospitality was a critical, life or death issue in antiquity.

You offered hospitality to a traveler, any stranger who came by because some day you may need someone else's hospitality to survive a long journey.

We don't think Jesus had his own biological children...

but yikes! He doesn't need any...he has these guys.

What parent hasn't overheard their kids arguing over who was mom or dad's favorite?

In our reading today, the apostles are arguing about status and power...

but Jesus confronts them,

Boys....you've got it all wrong...

If you want to be a leader in God's reign do not expect to hold the usual places of power, prestige or status

If you want to be a leader in the Reign of Heaven on Earth

you must serve the lowest and the poorest

without expecting anything in return,

and you must serve *especially* those who can not repay you....

Whaaaaatttt?

Jesus simply throws out all notions of quid pro quo...

He turns all social, political and religious expectations upside down.

Jesus did not preach a gospel of same old/same old.

He vehemently rejected a God who could be bought by following the rules and so that God would have to reward that person

with a place of status in 'heaven'...

Jesus refused to buy into a religious system that was based on the *appearance* of being a good follower of the law.

**The Good News of Jesus the Christ was that the old
social and religious order was done...
and the new Reign of God had arrived...
and now Mercy and Love held center stage**

**Now, the last shall be first breakfast
and those who used to be first shall be the servant of all.**

**Now forgiveness and mercy,
peace and love, kindness and compassion
are the standard bearers of God's Reign on Earth...**

**Now is the time. Here is the place.
The Reign of God has arrived!**

**And Jesus offers a little child as the image of this new reign of Heaven.
It was with a child that Jesus identified himself and his God...
By welcoming and tending the children,
we welcome and tend to the Holy One.**

**How we treat the children will reveal our true motivations, values, beliefs and aspirations.
How we treat the children will reveal who we really are
as a person and as a society.
How we treat the children is how we treat Christ and his Abba God!**

**Sometimes I think not much changed since the time of Jesus,
Sometimes I look at the street children,
the hungry children,
the gang banger children,
the slave traded children,**

**the lost children,
the addicted children,
the orphaned children,
the lonely children...
the refugee children,
and the children who have no breakfast
and the children who have no health insurance...
and we can see that the children are not doing to well these days...**

**Can *WE* see the face of God,
the presence of the Christ,
the reign of Heaven on Earth
in the faces of the children
no matter what color they are,
no matter whose family they belong to,
no matter what neighborhood they live in,
no matter which nation they call home?**

**Are we ready to welcome the children,
tend the children,
take care of the children?**

**Or are we arguing about our status, our prestige and our power?
and so still the question remains: How are the children? Amen.**