

## **“Childlike”**

The Reverend Doctor Barbara Edema, Bridge Pastor  
Sunday, September 23, 2018

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a

Mark 9:30-37

### **Cages.**

Children wailing. Children screaming for their mamas and papas.

Children in cages. Little ones.

Very. Little. Ones.

Parents in anguish. Why? Because they have lost their children. They were holding their babies when someone ripped them away and hid them in cages. They were holding the hands of their children when someone grabbed them and took them to...somewhere.

“Anguish” is not a big enough word.

Human rights violations. Oh, yes.

Crimes against humanity. Definitely.

Such corrupt governments who do this to children are far away. Lands with toxic leaders who leave people powerless and afraid.

They are places where dictators don’t care who suffers. They are places where law enforcement has gone bad. Really bad.

Oh. Wait. I know the land...

“My country ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty...”

Liberty.

Lady Liberty “...her name Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand glows worldwide welcome... ‘Keep, ancient lands, your stories pomp!’ cries she with silent lips. ‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!’”

I thought I knew this land.

I do not know this land.

Wretchedness has been unleashed on the Least of These. What we do to them, we do to Jesus Christ.

So, if you are part of the crowd who loves our dictator and believes these very little ones should be in cages away from their mamas, you are the ones who spit in the face of Jesus Christ.

Go ahead. Love your dictator and live in hate.

Don't be foolish enough to call yourselves pro-life, for destruction of life is being sown every second these very little ones are locked in cages away from their fathers.

Don't be foolish enough to call yourselves Christians. You do not have the right to wear his name so casually.

Where is Jesus today?

Sitting in cages with the little ones. The. Very. Little. Ones.

Because when it is done to the Least of These, it is done to him.

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The topsy-turvy kingdom of Jesus Christ doesn't make sense to the disciples and often doesn't make sense to us. At the very least, it catches us off guard.

Jesus, once again tells his disciples that he must suffer, die, and rise again. Once again, they understood none of this. But for some reason they were afraid to ask him about it. Why? What made them afraid to ask him to please explain himself? Why not get a few more details so his terrible story had a little more context? But they didn't ask.

They walked a few steps behind Jesus and argued about who is the greatest among them. Maybe because all they could comprehend was that Jesus was leaving and they would be left alone with their ministry. Perhaps they were trying to do a little secession planning.

Finally, Jesus turns and says, "What were you arguing about on the way?"

Silence.

Of course, he knew what they were arguing about. It's not that noisy walking in a city with no cars. He then gives them more topsy-turvy information. "Whoever among you wants to be first, must actually be last and servant of all."

He saw a child and set the child among them. Then he held the child. "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Children are precious. They are perfect little pieces of humanity. Until they get tired or hungry or are just having a hard day.

I always cringe when I see a parent yelling at their child in the grocery store. Or a little one desperately trying to keep up with an adult who walks way too fast for tiny legs to follow.

Sure, I've seen children who bully, act out for attention, and speak rudely to adults. People tend to enjoy handing out blame. It's the parent's fault. It's the teacher's fault. It's the child's fault.

Jesus saw something in the innocence of children. A tiny someone who took in their world with curiosity, delight, trust, and awe. When a child isn't living in fear or insecurity, he or she is free to live and grow in love.

I work in the food bank at the First Presbyterian Church in Lansing on Wednesdays. I work with wonderful people and get to serve wonderful people. Sometimes our clients bring their children in with them.

\*Mom with baby...

\*Neighbor...

### **Childlike. Childish.**

Our lesson in the epistle of James may be able to give us even more clarification

#### **From childlike to childish...**

James lays out pretty clearly what living a good life, or for our purposes this morning, a childlike life.

The opposite of childlike is childish.

Being **childlike** is this: living a good life where our work is done with gentleness born of wisdom.

Being **childish** is this: living with bitter envy and selfish ambition in our hearts. Being boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, and devilish.

Being **childlike** is this: living with the wisdom from above which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

Being **childish** is this: Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from the cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts.

We have a childish head of government in this country. We have a bully who locks up babies and children. We have a person who lives for conflict and dispute. Who murders souls. He thinks he is the greatest. He is not. He harms those who need protection most.

**Children aren't perfect. But Jesus thought they had the best bet of getting into heaven. They are born to the mercy of others. They depend entirely on the goodness and patience of those**

**who care for them. They have no high-standing in the community. They can't lend you any money to pay your bills. They can't right you a reference letter for a job you want. They live their little lives with hands open. With eyes wide. With expectation.**

**And so, it is such as these who will enter the kingdom of heaven. Once we have that figured out, our job is to make sure we find all those who live at the mercy of others. We find all those who depend on someone to help them through their days. We search for those who can remind us of what it means to live with open, inquisitive hearts, to belly-laugh when we see a butterfly, to cry when are sad, to go through life with trust that what is good will last for eternity.**

We are called to lift up the least of these, no matter how long they have been on this earth. This is why the least cannot be the last. This is why we search for the ones who have been castoff or relegated to the invisible table.

Whoever is great among you must be a servant to all. Whoever expects high praise and respect, must be the one who serves a feast to those at the invisible table.

Who is the greatest among us? Go to the food bank and see who comes in the door. Find the child who lived in hunger this weekend. Find the littlest, the least, and the unseen. Unleash the voices of those who have been made to be silent. Believe those who have been harmed and not protected. Look into their eyes. listen to their words. Bow down and serve them.

Hold onto them with all your might. For you will be touching at the face of God. Amen.