

SERMON: "STORIES OF HOPITALITY ... JESUS & CHILDREN"

TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT ISAIAH 58:5-9a
NEW TESTAMENT MARK 10:13-16

November 9, 2025
Consecration Sunday

Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

I've told you about my trip to South Africa. It was 2010, my sabbatical while serving a church in the Atlanta area. So many lessons learned on that trip, especially about the things we all have in common. People are people, Grandma Mary would say.

A little background first. About my mom, Annie. She was a preacher in a way. One of her oft repeated sermons was one addressed to my daughters in particular. It was the one that began "Young lady, when I was your age, my options were limited. I could be a nurse, a teacher, a secretary – that's about it. You, young lady, can be anything you want to be ... so be it."

So guess what happens when we get to South Africa? Me and my three oldest kids (all around 18 at the time) were staying with a black family in Capetown, in one of the townships, remnants of apartheid and the enforced segregation that literally sought to keep black people 'in their place.'

Lynn and Mama Bee threw a party for us, invited their friends over for a cookout. The men ended up out back around the grill. The women were inside. I went in to check and see how my daughter was getting along. She was in the kitchen surrounded in very loving and supportive circle. I overheard Mama Bee saying, "Young woman, when I was you age, my options were limited ..."

I will always smile thinking about that moment, that connection, the common bond shared all around the world by those who want what is best, better for the ones who will follow them. Thank you Mama Bee and Annie and Grandma Mary with her "people are people wherever you go" wisdom.

Can you picture those circles of support and encouragement?

One generation encouraging and challenging the next, passing on not just what they have learned but also what they hope for, what they dream. Isn't that a big part of what we seek to do here as "A Place for Everyone?"

The older I get, especially now with a grandson myself, I want to be part of that kind of community – Like Mama Bee's kitchen in Capetown. I humbly feel like I have something to give to, share with, those who will come after me. I want to pass it on.

That said, the older I get, the more I am learning that flow of wisdom is not one way. It is not meant to be just one way – from older generation to younger. It is meant to go both ways. Now that is "A Place for Everyone."

BRING THE KIDS

We've been looking at stories of hospitality in the gospels these last few weeks
Today we come to the story of Jesus welcoming, even blessing the children
and then going so far as to say we grownups need to learn something
from these children about how to receive the kingdom

People were bringing children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

People were bringing children to Jesus in order that he might touch them
I prefer the NIV translation that says 'lay his hands on them'
They, whoever they were – parents, older children bringing younger ones,
were bringing the children to be blessed, maybe not formally, but just to
reach out and touch someone the way we do with stars of sport and stage

This is something I've seen often. Something about that stage of life –
being a new parent, that leads many a couple to make their way to the church
wanting their child to grow up knowing that love, feeling that sense of belonging
I know I am indebted to all the people who helped me raise my children
All the surrogate grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins

Guess the disciples were not at that stage of life. The disciples spoke sternly
to the children and those who brought them. They grumbled, lots of that
in the gospels, people grumbling. I wish I had noticed how often the bible talks
about grumbling. Maybe it would've resulted in less grumbling on my part

A friend who serves a church in a small town – just five protestant churches in her town
told me recently about the new family they welcomed in their small church
The family had visited the other four churches. Same thing happened each time
The people greeted them, noticed their child with special needs
prone to make some sound ... then told the family about the nursery

The family showed up at my friend's church. They were welcomed and
encouraged to make themselves at home in worship, all of them. No mention of
a nursery. My friend knew there may be some noise. No problem.
Children are welcome here. All children. Bring the children, please!

That is our message. Bring the children. All children are welcome here

You notice the passage doesn't say anything about the children. My guess is,
being a father of four, they weren't all in that moment sweet and/or silent.
Shocker here – This preacher's kids weren't always angels. Like their father,
they could be rather loud and unruly. Let's say they were 'adventuresome.'

TO RECEIVE

So, about that verse where Jesus tells us we need to receive the kingdom of God like a child, let's not translate what we might learn from children into some rabbling on about child like innocence. I can only speak for myself, my brothers and my kids ... but our innocence pretty much consisted of answering the question "who did this?" with the stock answer, "not me."

So what does it mean then to receive the kingdom of God like a child?
Isn't the key word here "receive?" We receive the kingdom

This is Consecration Sunday, the day we present our offerings, our pledges for the next year. We need to make those estimates of giving so we might plan. We are asking for about a 3% growth in our giving. We can do that!
We can do that by beginning where we should begin – with our receiving
Our giving is giving back, giving back in response to what we have received

Sometimes we forget how very much we have received.
Kids are pretty good about receiving, not always, but for the most part
Can I get an 'amen' on that truth? Especially from any parents already
thinking ahead to Christmas. Maybe you've gotten a few suggestions already
But it's not just the smiles and excitement of Christmas and birthdays

One of the things, I thank God, I have had the eyes to see is how well children receive love. I see it often in their movements – the arms open wide, the head on the shoulder, the hug or snuggle, even the teenage eye roll
Seeing how freely they receive love, I see more clearly how my worries
And my cynicism (and other things) get in the way of my receiving.

I'm a grown up, but I still have some growing to do. I can still learn something new everyday. So let's try and learn a little something about receiving the kingdom.
Can I ask you do a little moving round, just a bit? Please turn and look around you
all the way around, look at all the people in this congregation. If you're online
you can visualize this or recognize people by the back of their head

As you look around consider what you have received and might receive from one another – make a mental note, download that file in your brain
We tend to make 'to do' lists. Why not make a list of the blessings, a list of what we have received, like newlyweds making a list of gifts received
Keep making that list, counting your blessings – what you have received.

I had that list of blessings scrolling through my mind last Sunday
I was and am so very proud of you and the way you turned up for worship at
and with Jubilee UMC in Waterloo. You went with the flow of how they do
Sunday morning worship. You went a little out of your comfort zone and
again learned Grandma Mary's lesson - people are people wherever you go

SUMMARY

I have been so very blessed to see you live out and live into what it means to be a place for everyone. What I keep learning is that effort, that goal begins with a humble recognition of how much we have received

God has made and keeps making us into a place for everyone. God gives. We receive
Then we give back – our money, our time, our energy, our imagination

So about your giving, some accounting. Please begin by counting your blessing.
We are blessed to have so many younger families with children who are a big part of this church. We have a balance of leadership with folks who have served for years and folks who are stepping up for maybe the first time. Count that blessing

We have infants who may make a bit of noise in worship. Great.
That is an “amen” as far as I am concerned. We have children and youth who may help lead worship or share their musical gifts
Another “amen”. We have busy parents who find time to be here
Find time to serve. Another “amen.” Count that blessing

We have people who are grandparent and great grandparent age who make the effort to learn a child’s name and learn from them and from their parents ... and not just about how to get their tech to work
Another “amen.” Count that blessing. We have received all that and more

So as you think about your giving for the next year ...
My ask of you is that you give thought to how much you have received
Then make a decision about how you might give back

Oh, and one more quick point about your giving, about welcoming children
Please set aside enough money to buy the cookies or the popcorn or whatever it is that a child might be selling. And be thankful
you are a part of a church with those children

And if you don’t really need the cookies ... I can help you with that.
I’m good at receiving thin mints