

“And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me...’” (Mark 9:36) I feel sorry for the poor kid who happened to be there the day Jesus decided to use him as an “object lesson.” No child likes being used in this way. Some of us can remember being stood up before a group of adults and having our parents ask us to recite something we’d just learned in school. Or being made to sit down at the piano and play some stupid little piece for our family’s friends. **We wanted to shrink into the woodwork and become invisible. How humiliating!**

Frederick Buechner describes the boy in Jesus’ story in these words: *“Jesus...puts his hands on his shoulders so he won’t make a run for it. The child stands wide-eyed, more than a little scared, much more than a little embarrassed, toeing the dust. If it weren’t for the honor of the thing, he’d as soon have been left unnoticed. He wishes he’d had time to get the hair out of his eyes and button up his shirt, at least to spit out his bubblegum.”*

It is so unlike our Lord to embarrass anyone in this fashion - much less a child. For Jesus to have done such a thing--there must have been a very good reason. And there was.

WHY DID JESUS USE A CHILD TO MAKE HIS POINT?? Mark says: **“AND THEY WERE BRINGING CHILDREN TO HIM...AND THE DISCIPLES REBUKED THEM.”** (Mark 10:13) Through the centuries there have been far too many **Christians who have felt that their primary calling in life was that of REBUKING SOMEONE.** There have been too many who have felt that God wanted them to look around to see if anybody was having any fun, so they could put a stop to it. A priest once said to Groucho Marx: “Oh, Mr. Marx, I want to thank you for bringing so much joy into the world.” To which Groucho, always quick on the uptake replied, rather ungraciously, I think, “I want to thank you for taking so much out.” He was ungracious, but he had a point. A lot of religious folk seem bent on bringing their wet blankets to every party. **The disciples too, were always rebuking somebody.**

But it is shocking that they should have rebuked anyone for bringing children to Jesus. Halford Luccock asks in the INTERPRETER’S BIBLE: **“How could they be with Christ so continuously, seeing what he cared about most, hearing his words, and still fail so dismally to understand him?”** Luccock answers his own question by saying: **“Here is a mirror. Look into it. That will help you fathom the mystery....”** How could they miss the point of Jesus’ message? How can we? All through the years, even among those who profess to follow Jesus the most, **there have been those who have missed His message.** It is hard to believe, but there have even been those over the history of the Christian Church who have had stern rebukes for those who have tried to bring children to Jesus. The discovery of the child as a person of inalienable rights is a relatively new one in Christian history...and child labor laws were not passed until nineteen centuries after Jesus...and most were passed over the objections of church people! They supported long hours of child labor because it kept the children off the streets!

And then there was that shameful period in the history of the Church when theologians actually taught that unbaptized infants who died were fit candidates for damnation simply because some idiot had not splashed a few drops of water upon their heads! Can you imagine anything more out of keeping with the teachings and example of Jesus?? I cannot. It was not until the 19th century American Congregationalist minister Horace Bushnell wrote his epoch-making book “Christian Nurture,” that children began to be recognized as members of God’s family. **It seems that it took the church 19 centuries to catch up with Jesus...and in some areas it still has a lot of catching up to do.**

ONLY ONCE DID JESUS SAY ANYTHING NEGATIVE ABOUT CHILDREN. We find it in Luke 7:31-34. Here Jesus was making a sharp and cutting criticism of some of the most respected religious leaders of His day, the Pharisees. Many of them were so rigidly righteous that they thought they had a corner on God’s market. **Jesus compared them to children playing in a marketplace...or rather, NOT playing, sitting around glaring at one another, sulking and pouting. Why? Because the gang wasn’t playing the games they wanted.** If you asked them “Why aren’t you playing?” you could hear them reply, “They won’t play.” Then the answer would come: “You won’t play, yourself. *We wanted to play wedding,* but you said ‘that’s too silly!’ *We wanted to play funeral,* but you said, ‘that’s too serious.’ *We want to play, but they won’t play our way.*” So, there they sit, glowering at one another. **TOTALLY IN A DEADLOCK.** Dr. Eugene Brice tells a disturbing story about a minister who returned to visit a church he had once served. He ran into Bill, who had been an elder and leader in the church, but who wasn’t

around anymore. The pastor asked, "Bill, what happened? You used to be there every time the doors opened." "Well, Pastor," said Bill, "a difference of opinion arose in the church. Some of us couldn't accept the final decision and we established a church of our own." "Is that where you worship now?" asked the pastor. "No," answered Bill, "we found that there, too, the people were not faithful and a small group of us began meeting in a rented hall, at night." "Has that proven satisfactory?" asked the minister. "No, I can't say that it has," Bill responded, "Satan was active even in that fellowship, so my wife and I withdrew and began to worship on Sunday at home by ourselves." "Then at last you've found inner peace?" asked the pastor. "No, I'm afraid we haven't," said Bill. "Even my wife began to develop ideas I was not comfortable with, so now she worships in the northeast corner of the living room and I am in the southwest..." Does that sound far-fetched to you? **Then you haven't read church history!**

Unfortunately, we see childishness at work in the world wherever we turn. **On a world level**, we see nations unwilling to play the game of peace. **On a national level** we find too many politicians who put the good of their own party or their own personal friends above the good of the country as a whole. **On our home levels** we are often divided by childishness. You've all seen those tags hanging in automobile windows, "Child on board." I saw one awhile back which said: "***Childish adult at the wheel.***" One of the places where all of us become a bit childish is when we're driving down the road and some idiot cuts in front of us. **Childishness on the street, in the home, in the workplace, even (God forbid) in the Church!**

BUT LISTEN...we are not called by Jesus to be "CHILD-ISH," but "CHILD-LIKE."

Jesus said, "***WHOEVER DOES NOT RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE A CHILD SHALL NOT ENTER IT.***" (Mark 10:15)

In childhood Jesus found the perfect "WAY" for you and I to receive Membership into the Kingdom.

Not in child-ish-ness, but child-like-ness.

I love the story about the grandmother who got a note from her son and daughter-in-law that her grandchildren would be coming to spend the week with her. She loved her precious little granddaughter and lively little grandson, and when she thought about the pleasures that awaited her with them in her home, she went to church and **put \$5 dollars in the offering plate as a token of thanksgiving**. She kept her granddaughter and grandson for that week and what a week it was. When they went home, she went back to church and put a **\$20-dollar bill in the offering plate "to give thanks!"** Thanks, that her time with them was over!! **Let's not be too sentimental about children. They can be little demons in human form, sometimes.** This past summer I watched a video on U-Tube on the internet which showed a couple's grandchildren walking hand in hand along the beach. Just as the film was allowing the viewer to get emotionally wrapped up in "how cute they looked" the bigger brother pushed his little sister down in the sand! **And so, it goes.** Children are not always little angels. ***But they have some endearing qualities that caused Jesus to single them out as object lessons for the disciples - and for us.***

The one quality which I wish to single out this morning is "ENTHUSIASM" or "SPONTANEITY." **Adults are careful and calculating. Children tend to jump right in, feet first, unafraid. They act on impulse**, and that isn't all bad. Someone once said: "Distrust first impulses. They are nearly always right." But another has said, "Don't look before you leap. If you do, you will decide to sit down." There is among too many of us, such a careful, cautious attitude toward our religious faith that we hesitate to take the bold action, make the bold and daring move.

But the child-like spirit is one of daring to take risks...not knowing it is impossible, they are willing to try to do it anyway!

There's something exuberant and unrestrained about children. They have an "ENTHUSIASM" for life that we tend to lose as we grow older. They have a sense that anything is possible. As adults, we admire children's childish enthusiasm. But it seems that we also tend to encourage the kids to outgrow it. Syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman, a few years ago, wrote these wise words: "We raise our children with ethical time bombs, built-in disillusionment alarms. We allow our children their ideals until they are perhaps 13 or 15 or 18 or 22. But if they don't let go of their ideals, we worry about whether they will be able to function in the real world. After all, the real world is someplace else. We have to be tough and even a little cynical." Goodman goes on to give examples of what

she means: “Adults know that clean air is all very nice, but it must be balanced against jobs. Adults know that helping others is neat, but it may well take away their motivation to find a job. Adults know that peace is swell, but we can’t ever trust our enemies to ever stop preparing for war.” Goodman concludes that this so-called realism of adults may be the true “junk food” of our time. “We instill ideals in our children, resent it when our children challenge us for not living up to them, and then feel reassured when our kids give up their ideals like sleds or cartoons.”

Can this be what Jesus had in mind when he asked His disciples not to lose the child-like spirit; when he warned them about hindering little children on their way into the kingdom?

Do you know the ORIGIN of the word “enthusiasm?” It literally means, “IN GOD.” When anyone was really roused, it was assumed in ancient times that a god had possessed him. This possession was “enthusiasm,” from the Greek *enthusiasmos; en theos* (A GOD WITHIN). Emerson said, “*Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.*” **This building was not built (60) years ago without enthusiasm.**

Our church will not continue its ministry into the next 100 YEARS without enthusiasm. A minister was showing a friend around his church, and, referring to the sound system, said, “We have a number of dead spots in this church.” The clergy friend said, “So do we all, brother, so do we all.” **Enthusiasm is one child-like attitude we can all adopt to our benefit.**

In 1985, the LOS ANGELES TIMES ran a beautiful human-interest story. It happened a few days after the disastrous earthquake in Mexico City. **A little Japanese-American boy was going door-to-door in Los Angeles selling picture postcards for twenty-five cents each.** He was giving the profits for earthquake relief. One man bought some post cards from the little boy...and then he asked the boy how much he hoped to raise. The little boy answered quickly, **“One million dollars!”** The man smiled and said, “Do you mean to tell me that you are trying to raise a million dollars to help the earthquake victims all by yourself?” **“Oh no, sir,” replied the boy, “my BIG BROTHER is helping me!”**

Well, when Christ comes into our lives we become ENTHUSIASTIC ...God-FILLED. We simply can’t sit still...we want to get out and do something about it. **And WITH THE HELP OF OUR “Big Brother” we will do Amazing things to make His Kingdom known!!! Amen.**