

## “JESUS TOOK A CHILD”

Mark 9:30-37

Children can be so cute. Politicians know that. They love having photo ops where they go visit a school and talk with them. It makes for good PR. Even Saddam Hussein tried to get in on that when he tried a TV appearance with a nervous hostage British child in August, 1990 before the Gulf War began.

So it is only natural for us to see Jesus with children. Imagine Jesus without having children around. It would seem so out of character.

But we also have to see our view of children today. Children can be cute to us because of what it means to have children today. It is a great tragedy if a child dies. Today in this country around 6.5 children out of 1,000 die. In 1900 250 children out of 1,000--1 out of every 4-- didn't make it to adulthood. In 1800 only around 500 survived—half of all children born! You could not invest the kind of emotional energy into getting attached to child, especially as babies and toddlers when they were most at risk. And people had a lot more children because they didn't have birth control, they got married at an earlier age, and they needed children to help do chores. You didn't have the luxury of thinking of children as cute.

That was even more so in Jesus' time. In that culture men often ate the meal before the rest of the family. It was not so much a matter of men being cruel, but of survival. The man was the one who had to work and make the means by which the family survived. If he was weak and sick, everyone in the family suffered. You couldn't afford the means to give special clothing or toys to children. It is not that people didn't love their children; it was just that they couldn't afford to make such a fuss about them. And they weren't cute.

It was also a world in which truly children were to be seen not heard. If someone was important in society, he was too important to be bothered with children. No mother would dare let her child. No matter how cute you and I might think that child is, interfere with someone like that. Taking time for a child would be completely beneath the dignity of someone important.

Yet Mark tells us, “Jesus took a child and put him in the midst of the disciples, and put the child in His arms.” This was not a “natural” thing to do. This was not for a good photo op. This was shocking! If that was not enough, Jesus says, “Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.” Choosing a child? What was wrong with that?

When looking at famous sports team one that often comes to mind is the 1992 US Olympic Basketball team, better known as the “Dream Team.” After a long time policy of not allowing professional athletes participate in the games, they were finally allowed in 1992. The US had dominated men's basketball until 1968, when they barely won. Then they were shocked by the Soviet Union in 1972 and only took the bronze in 1988. But in 1992 they had Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Patrick Ewing, Charles Barkley, John Stockton, Karl

Malone, Clyde Drexler, Scottie Pippen—all Hall of Fame players! How could they lose?

Too bad you can't have a team like that if you are in a fantasy game. You are limited because other people want the players you want. I remember playing pick-up baseball. You would imagine you represented an All-Star line-up. You would come to bat and pretend you were someone like Mickey Mantle or Hank Aaron or Willie Mays. The better the player, the better you thought you would be. Perhaps as a child you played a pick-up game where you choose sides. Whom would you pick for your team? The slowest? The most awkward? The smallest?

But that is what Jesus picked. He didn't take the child because the child was cute and cuddly. He took a child because it was the least obvious. It was like picking the worst for the team.

Americans may act like we like to see the little guy win. We like upsets—they are what make a week in football exciting. But that is not how you win. The movie "Moneyball" was about the general manager of the Oakland A's baseball team who struggled because they did not have a big market and could not afford to keep key players. The movie shows how he used computer statistics to choose new players for the team who were inexpensive, but actually helped the team to win a record 20 games in a row. The movie makes it appear that a bunch of losers accomplished that. What it doesn't show is that the team also had Miguel Tejada, who won the American MVP that season, and Barry Zito, who won the Cy Young Award for best pitcher. Oakland won because of good players.

But Jesus did not. Why did He choose the disciples in the first place? They may have thought He did because they had something to offer. That is why Mark says, "They had argued with one another about who was the greatest." But that was hardly the case. No, by choosing a child Jesus was sowing them and us today that He does not choose because of who we are, but because of who He is.

Jesus has just told the disciples for the second time, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him." That is not what we would choose. We want to win, not lose. We want to succeed, not fail. But Jesus chose the path that lead to the cross, the very bottom. In Jesus we see that God does not do things by the way we would choose to do them. He does things by grace.

That is why Jesus put a child before Him. A child is nothing; it is helpless. The child has nothing to offer, just as we are in the face of God. Yet, by grace, God chooses us!

That affects how we relate to each other. God's Church is for all kinds of people. God doesn't just choose the brightest and the best, but from all peoples. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 compares the people in the Church with parts of the human body. He says, "Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty."

Because Jesus accepts all kinds of people, the Church will contain people who often will not fit in with other people. God's "Dream Team" is not the same as ours.

We have a Student Fellowship time each Wednesday evening when the university is in session. The first class this semester asked the question, "Am I Good Enough?" That is a question we ask whether we are a student trying to pass a class, an employee starting a new job, a young parent, a newlywed wife, or middle aged worker unsure that he still has what it takes to do his job. But with God it is never about, "Am I good enough?" We are never "good enough." We all sin. In Jesus the question is now, "Am I loved enough?" The fact that God has called us in Jesus to be a part of His team more than answers that question. We look to the cross and see Jesus dying for us. We know we are so very loved!