



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### February 10, 2013

### "Let The Little Children Come To Me" (Gospel of Luke Series)

### The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

**T**oday we are going to talk about children in three ways: their relationship with Jesus, their relationship with God's church, and how we are to be like them.

Children are precious, innocent, pure, and funny! Here are some children's letters to God:

"Dear God, thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy." - Joyce

"Dear God, please send me a pony. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up." - Bruce

"Dear God, if we come back as something, please don't let me be Jennifer Horton because I hate her." - Denise

"Dear God, I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions." - Ruth

"Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the world. There are only four people in our family, and I can never do it." - Nan

"Dear God, why is Sunday school on Sunday? I thought it was supposed to be our day of rest."  
- Tom L. (from [www.k-state.edu/parent/humor/god/](http://www.k-state.edu/parent/humor/god/))

Since we are in the Gospel of Luke series, I am going to reference two passages from Luke:

one which just happens to be the next one in the series and then the other one a couple of chapters later.

*Luke 17:1 Jesus said to His disciples, "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come!"*

*Luke 17:2 It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.*

I should point out here that "little ones" can mean either children or new believers. If it's children, then they would also be new believers.

The passage starts off with a bang; hard and fast. It's just like *Star Wars Part IV - the New Hope* starting off with the huge battle cruiser of Darth Vader going after the ships of the Alliance. Boom! Right into the thick of it.

Jesus says, there will be challenges in life. Children and new believers will have challenges, but woe to you if these challenges or stumbling blocks are because of you! That's a stern, in-your-face warning!

The phrase "stumbling block" in the original Greek text is *skandalon*, from which we get the English word *scandal*. It actually

referred to a stick that was used to bait wild animals. Eventually the use of the word *bait-stick* turned into the word for a stumbling block of wood that was placed intentionally in front of someone to trip him or her and cause a fall. In fact, that's what a scandal does.

But here are the words of Jesus. I imagine Him saying it in a clear, direct voice: "Should YOU be the ONE to HARM CHILDREN, BAIT THEM to wrongdoing, or MAKE THEM stumble, better for you to have a huge weight (like a millstone) put around your neck and thrown into the deep sea than for you to deal with Me!"

In dealing with children, it is clear from Jesus that children are precious, innocent, valuable, and worthy of our praise. So defend them! Protect them, at all cost!

One of the reasons I love Compassion International is that its president, Wess Stafford, has zero tolerance for any kind of abuse, harm, or molestation to any child. I know he will do anything, anything, to ensure the safety of Compassion children. He will also make sure there are safeguards for his staff to have high integrity and that they are passionate about protecting children to release them from poverty in Jesus' name. Why? Because when Wess, as a child, was sent to a school for missionary children, he and other children were sexually abused in the school.

In a missionary school run by supposed Christians! President Wess Stafford will do anything to protect children.

I can hear Jesus saying, “Far better for those leaders of Wess’ former school to have a millstone, a heavy weight tied around their neck and thrown in to the sea than for them to deal with Me.”

To the promoters and producers of child slavery and pornography in this world, Jesus says, “Far better to have a weight tied around your neck and thrown into the sea than for you to deal with Me.”

A few months ago I spoke to 160 of our men, and I told them that we need to work together to get away from pornography because if we don’t, we are directly or indirectly FUNDING a multi-billion dollar industry that abuses women and children. Every time you click on a porn site on your laptop or smart phone, you are doing a dumb thing—you are supporting evil men whom Jesus Himself is asking us to oppose.

Throughout the Bible, we see evidence time and time again that Jesus wants to protect women and children because He loves them. How do we know that? We find that out in Luke chapter 18 where people were all around Jesus.

*Luke 18:15 People were bringing even infants to Him that He might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it.*

*Luke 18:16 But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not*

*stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*

Imagine the scene. People find out that Jesus, the Messiah, is in their area and so they rush to Him. They’re bringing even their babies to Him for a blessing.

But the disciples, being His entourage, His self-appointed bodyguards and managers, block the people. They in essence yell, “Get back! Get back! Jesus is a busy man! I don’t care if you brought your babies and children. He doesn’t want to be with your ankle-biting, snotty kids! Get back!”

But then Jesus says, “Hey, Disciples! What are you doing? Cut it out! Bring the children to me! I want to be with them.”

And so the disciples say, “Hey, kids, we were just kidding! Boy, did we punk you guys. Come on, of course, Jesus wants to see the children. Come to Jesus.”

The Bible text says: Hinder not the children from coming to Jesus! Why? Because many children instinctively will follow Jesus if they are just introduced to Him.

That is why Children’s Ministry has to be of utmost importance at this church. It’s not a sideline. It’s not a sideshow. It’s not a side stage. It’s the main stage.

It’s why we have spent and will spend millions of dollars over the years on Children’s Ministry. And in case you didn’t know, we are investing in renovations downstairs in the Children’s Ministry area to make more room for children and to make the presentation of the gospel easier for them.

Did you know that according to pollster George Barna, a 2003 survey of American

Christians showed that 32% of adult American evangelical Christians embraced Jesus as their Savior between the ages of 5 and 12? That’s 32%! But once past the age of 12 and into the 13-to-18 age range, only four percent of adults polled embraced Jesus during those years. And only six percent for those 19 years or older.

In other words, Barna is saying that if people do not embrace Jesus Christ as Savior before they reach their teenage years, the chances of their doing so at all is slim.

In his research there was a small difference between the percentage of spiritual standing of adults and those exiting their childhood years. By the age of 13, your spiritual identity is largely set in place, according to Barna.

Many churches see the children’s ministries as a loss leader – meaning we use children to get the adults who are the real treasure – but no – Jesus is saying to us, “Hinder not the children from coming to Me. Bring them close to me. Let them know Me as their Friend, Savior and Lord.”

That’s why we had Eggstravaganza, and FX (Family Experience), family picnics on July 4<sup>th</sup> and a great Children’s Ministries staff led by Karen Makishima doing Sunday School. We are spending thousands of dollars on remodeling the Children’s area downstairs. Why? Because it is in the early years that children make decisions to follow and trust Jesus. They deserve the best!

For those in middle school, we have started a new Bible class with Nan Fancher on Sundays at 8 am. Fourteen middle schoolers have already signed up.

**T**hen on to Nick Love and Pastor Drew Hulse, whose teachings go deep into their hearts about the relevance of Jesus Christ in today's world.

The Barna statistics say that most people accepted Christ before they were 13. But FPC is different, praise God. We don't neglect adults. In the last Alpha Course taken by more than 200 people – 30% of the adults who finished the course discovered a new relationship in Jesus. 30%!

In the prior two Alpha Courses totaling 300 people, their exit survey showed 23% of them discovered a new relationship in Christ. That's stunning and great news! You see why it is important to invite family and friends.

So we don't give up on the adults thinking, "Well they had their chance." And we certainly do not want to miss the opportunity of leading our children into a loving relationship with Jesus whom they can trust and live for.

You have heard Tom Brokaw refer to the generation that grew up during the Great Depression and then went on to fight in World War II as "The Greatest Generation." But hear this: our children today may grow up to be the greatest generation OF ALL TIME, but we need to lead them to Christ first to give them the stamina, character, and wisdom they will need.

With all the stress and the challenges in our world, financial problems and threats of war in a post-modern time, the children who are growing up today have the opportunity to be the most incredible generation of all time.

Yes, there is evil in the world. Yes, there is opposition. But God is calling on us to raise up a generation that will take advantage of opportunities that no other generation has had before to tell others about the love of Jesus.

When I say opportunities I mean opportunities in the digital world, in the Internet world, in the video world. With iPhones, iPads, and iCloud, today's children can be the generation with the widest impact ever if we can give them the tools now of how to have a strong relationship with Jesus. If we but teach them about what the Bible says so that they might have the principles that will guide them and protect them through life and its challenges.

But we are not finished yet with this Scripture passage from Luke. There's one more step that can take us deeper and further. Jesus ends our passage for today with these words.

*Luke 18:17 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."*

There it is. Can we adults live as children, the only way we will understand God and His kingdom? This is easy but at the same time hard.

A child trusts one who is stronger than he. A child runs without abandon to one whom she knows loves her unconditionally. A child will do anything a loving adult tells him to do. A child is motivated to learn from one who protects her.

Can we say the same things towards Jesus who is loving, wiser, stronger, and more forgiving than any one else who has walked this earth? Can we have that complete abandon, that complete trust

towards God? We all need to get back to a child-like faith because that will show us more and more about God and His Kingdom.

But here's the kicker: The reason it is hard for us to love, trust, forgive, or live without fear is that something may have happened to us in our childhood. Many of the lies we believe about ourselves happened because of cruel or unloving things said to us in the home or on the playground by other kids or by a parent, a coach, a teacher, or a friend.

Because of those lies or lack of affirmation we today may think we are not smart enough, attractive enough, athletic enough, accomplished enough or lovable enough because of things that happened in our childhood. Hence, we need to be aware of those hurts and lies, but we also need to seek healing from them.

One of the big parts of our regular healing services—with the next one happening next Sunday night—is that we pray for inner healing. There are abuses, scars, and emotional wounds from the past that only God can heal. Prayer can help. There are bruises and deep hurts that God needs us to acknowledge and have the courage to seek for therapy.

And we should have no problem finding help because we're on an island that has a lot of Christian therapists. Our church can help you find one that suits you and your needs. There is no stigma anymore about seeking help in counseling. The healthy do seek help.

We need to get back to being like trusting and loving children to God.

**T**he irony is that we need to remember and be the child that God created and not let our childhood hurts hinder us from the most perfect heavenly Father, coach, teacher, and friend there is—Jesus Christ.

And if there are deep hurts, we need to get to the lap of Jesus. Today Jesus is saying to us, “Come unto me, My children.”

In response, we can say today, “I Come, Lord. I want to come to you. And come, Holy Spirit as healer, comforter, and counselor, and heal my wounds.”

Even as a healthy child of God, we can say, “I am not perfect. I am not smart enough or strong enough to overcome the challenges in life. “I need God. I need His healing. I need the love of Christ that can sustain me. I need a child like-faith that says, ‘Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong. Yes Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me—the Bible tells me so.’”

Let’s sing it, and then let’s pray.

\* \* \* \*

*Listen to, watch, or read this sermon and past sermons online at [www.fpchawaii.org](http://www.fpchawaii.org).*

*You can also download sermon podcast from [www.fpchawaii.posterous.com](http://www.fpchawaii.posterous.com) or iTunes.*

*Sermons can also be viewed on TV at KALO channel 25 (or 1025 in HD): Sundays 3 am, 11 am / Mondays 3 am, 11 am, 7:30 pm / Wednesdays 3 am, 11 am, 7:30 pm / Thursdays 3 am / Saturdays 4 am, 5 pm*