



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

July 17, 2016 - Matthew 18:1-5

"He's My Dad!" (Encounters With Jesus Series)

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Aloha, I am Karen Makishima. I currently serve as your Family Life Director and I have the privilege of bringing today's message.

What if the world was led by children, guided by their good instinct and desire to do good? Imagine what that would look like. (<https://www.youtube.com/embed/OWG3rtGoIII>)

What if it's not Evian water, but Jesus, who is telling us to "live young?" Let's look at our Lord Jesus' words who told us how to live young.

Matthew 18:1-5: *At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* ² *He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.*

³ *And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* ⁴ *Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* ⁵ *And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*

So if you want to serve the "greatest" in the Kingdom of heaven...have I got a job for you!!! (Shows Children's Ministry job

posting). Nah, just joking...but not really.

Would you pray with me?
"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14) In Jesus' name. Amen.

I have worked so hard to become a responsible adult, and now Jesus is saying that I must become like a child to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? I finally get my bed made (most days), clear my dishes to the sink (without a reminder), and have even been entrusted with a family and a ministry. What does Jesus mean by saying we must change and become like little children? How do we grow older and yet live younger?

If we back up a bit in the book of Matthew, Jesus is telling His disciples that He is about to suffer. Our Lord is about to be whipped, punched, His head will be pierced with a crown of thorns, and He is about to be crucified on a cross. These men that He chose to do life with didn't say, "Jesus, give us strength to suffer alongside of you." No, that's not what is happening here. You see the disciples didn't get it. They weren't thinking about Jesus. They were thinking of their own prestige. They wanted to know who

was going to be the greatest in this Kingdom of heaven where Jesus would reign as King.

In the book of Mark, another book of the gospels, Mark tells us his account of what happened. In Chapter 9, it says that the disciples were actually arguing about who was going to be the greatest!

And in Chapter 10 listen to the conversation that takes place:

Mark 10:35 - James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

10:36 - And he (Jesus) said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

10:37 - And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

They wanted to know, "What does the org chart look like, Jesus? Okay, you can be on top but who's next? Can it be ME?"

I can just see them comparing themselves to each other by promoting their own power and status, each jockeying for position to be the one closest to Jesus.

Peter may have said, "It must be me—for I am known as the rock."

John could have said, "But Lord, I am the one that You love."

Andrew might have said, "But I was the first to follow You."

And how about Matthew? This is what he could have said, "Hey, I had a great job as a tax collector, and I left it all to follow You. It must be me."

They are acting just like me and maybe you, too. I LOVE to be the favorite!! Here's a picture of my siblings and me. They would pummel me if they saw that my picture was the biggest. But what can I say? I'm a middle child, and we have issues.

I used to have a figurine on my desk that said this, "Jesus loves you—but I'm His favorite." But I'm not really sure what happened to it.

Can we relate whether it's family, work, or friends? Maybe even as you serve at church?

But how did the disciples get here? How do we get here? Is it jealousy? Is it pride or just good ol' ambition?

And then Jesus did what He does so well. He goes right to the core of the issue and turns their thinking upside down. He said that the way to climb this ladder to the kingdom is not thinking upward (no, don't think of yourselves as being the greatest) but think downward (by having a humble status like a child).

Mitchell, can you come on up please? Look at this child. He is not a wage earner; he is not very strong; he has no influence; no authority; no power; he is completely dependent upon his parents; and Jesus says that

he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Jesus is giving value to children in a society where children were treated like second class citizens. Jesus is saying that whoever welcomes a child of lowly status welcomes Him. You see the world saw Jesus as someone with low status, too.

In Matthew 18:3 Jesus said: *"Truly I tell you, unless you change (convert) and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

To "change" or in some translations it says to "convert" means to twist, to strengthen from the base of, or to turn around.

Let's look at that second part of that verse, for Jesus says something very heavy duty. He says: *"Truly I tell you, unless you change (convert) and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

You will never enter?? Those are some strong words! Here the disciples are arguing over who is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And now they are discovering they may not even enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus is saying to His disciples, "You need to totally change the way you think so that your thinking is in agreement with God."

To become like a child is to rethink how we view life. Jesus redefined their view of what success was. For example: Jesus redefined success as being dependent, not independent.

Redefining Success Dependence vs Independence

Dependence upon Jesus leads to greatness! Independence or self-reliance, can lead to worry, fear, stress & anxiety. When we live the life of independence we must earn our worth. We feel great when we are on top—just like the disciples. But once our performance declines we feel inadequate and usually become depressed or feel unworthy.

Here is a picture of Claire walking with her daddy. What do you see? Claire is not trying to lead the way but is completely enJOYing the journey because she TRUSTS that her daddy knows where they are going, and she knows that he wants the very best for her.

Isn't this what Jesus wants for us? To reach out and put our right hand into His, surrendering our own need for control and power and trusting in His power. When we become dependent like a child there is no worry, fear or stress. Dependence on Jesus leads to greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Redefining Success Joy/Contentment vs Never Enough

Another example of redefining success is having joy and being content versus never having enough. We know that kids can be bratty, whiney, and even selfish. But we also know that kids have no concept of time. They know how to truly be in the moment and enJOY what they are doing to the fullest. Most kids they need a ten-minute warning before you change an activity because they are so engrossed with what they are doing.

I think that this is what Jesus meant when He said “you must become like a child.” He wants us to have JOY in the now! This is success in Jesus’ eyes. When we are always striving for more, we miss the now and JOY is found only in the now.

Redefining Success Adventure/Discovering/Exploring vs Busy

Another example of redefining success is being adventurous, wanting to discover and explore His creation versus always being busy.

When we strive to have more we tend to live the hurried life. We have Wunderlists within our Wunderlists. We are stretched way too thin. We do not take the time to look up or out. We are missing it! Some of us are even getting injured from not looking up from texting or playing games like Pokemon Go on our smart phones.

God created us to enJOY Him and His creation.

Psalm 19:1 – *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.”*

May I encourage us all to look up and see the glory of God!

Have you ever noticed how a child knows how to see, hear, taste, touch and feel life? What do you see in this photo? (child eating). Do you see the mess, or do you see Maggie thoroughly enjoying her food?

Kids know how to look up. Jesus is defining success as being like a child enjoying His creation.

Redefining Success Open to Influence vs Arrogant

And lastly, I believe that Jesus has redefined success by wanting us to be open to godly influence versus being a know it all.

When Jesus instructed His disciples to change and become like children, He may have been saying that He wants our hearts to always be open to Godly Influence.

Maria Montessori, a medical doctor and educator, discovered that in a child’s life there are these times called “sensitive periods”. We know that in the first five years of a child’s life, the brain is developing more rapidly than any other time. The first 12 years of a child’s life is where they just absorb like sponges. Their hearts are open and pliable. They are not set in their ways. They have no prejudice. Kids do not see color in others. What we do in these formative years really does matter.

Please don’t hear me wrong. This doesn’t mean that we need to make sure that our children have all kinds of sports and tutoring. It is during these early years children can learn how to have a relationship with Jesus that is genuine. That’s why I love bringing a child on the chancel, the stage up here, to pray. Their prayers are so genuine. We adults can learn so much from them.

When we create the proper soil, it is during these years they can learn how to love God, the earth He created, and how to love others. They, like us adults, need time in their life that is unhurried where they can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus redefined success by desiring that our hearts remain open to godly influence like a child.

So how do we live? How do we change our way of thinking? Are we supposed to leave our life of responsibilities; throw away our Wunderlists?

In the Life Application Bible it says, *“In God’s Kingdom, greatness lies in acceptance of and dependence upon the Savior.”* It is “putting simple trust in someone we love.”

I don’t know what your view of your Heavenly Father is like. Sometimes the dysfunction of our own earthly dad taints our perspective of what God is like—especially if we have been abandoned, rejected or not valued.

I had an amazing dad growing up as a young child living in the midwest. He taught us kids how to respect others, work hard, and how to have fun. Most summer weekends you would find us water skiing or water sledding on Raccoon Lake. In the evening, we would sit around the campfire and eat s’mores looking up at the stars.

In the wintertime, we would put on those same water skis and pull each other around behind our motorcycle in the snow.

I was totally dependent upon my parents (and never even thought about it). I enJOYed exploring and discovering my world around me.

At 14 years old, my parents moved our family of six to the beautiful island of Oahu to help support a little struggling church in Palolo Valley. Soon after we arrived my dad left our family for another woman and her family. We were devastated. Didn’t we matter anymore? Who would care for us?

Each of us kids and my mom felt rejected and abandoned. It left a life-long scar on me.

To this day some 40 years later, I am still learning to trust and depend completely on Jesus by claiming my worth and value found in Him. Jesus continues to ask me to trust Him. He reminds me over and over again that He loves me, and He will not abandon me. And for those days when I feel inadequate as His child or I strive to earn my worth, He woos me back to Himself through His Word, through His creation, and through You His chosen people.

By the way, I love my father who passed away several years ago. I do feel like he had done the best he could with what he had. He made some huge mistakes, and I know that he has regretted what he did.

I want you to know, as your Family Ministry Director, I recognize the importance of being a godly parent and just how difficult it is. We are imperfect people, striving to raise imperfect children, hoping for perfection. It is my desire and my team's desire to partner with you as you spiritually raise your children to know their Creator and to learn to trust, to surrender, and to depend on Him alone.

The hope for all of us is found in a letter called Romans that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome.

Roman 8:15 – *“The Spirit you received doesn't make you slaves. Otherwise you would live in fear again. Instead, the Holy Spirit you received made you God's adopted child. By the Spirit's power we call God Abba. Abba means Father.”* (NIRV)

God is the Heavenly Father we have always wanted—perfect in all ways.

Would you imagine something with me? If possible, let's wipe away any preconceived ideas of how our own earthly dad has let us down. Let's start with a clean slate. Try to visualize our PERFECT heavenly Father now:

- This Heavenly Father made YOU & ME in His image. He made us to reflect the goodness of who He is. **HE'S OUR DAD!**

- This Heavenly Father designed and equipped us to have purpose loving others. **HE'S OUR DAD!**

- This Heavenly Father provides for ALL of our needs. He doesn't give us what we want; He gives us what we need. He is very strategic about this. Even the hurts that He allows us to encounter will one day be used to bring Him glory. He desires the VERY BEST for you and for me. **HE'S OUR DAD!**

- This Heavenly Father created the entire universe for you and me to explore! Color, texture, fragrance, taste and sounds were all made by HIM for our enJOYment and for us to care for. **HE'S OUR DAD!**

- This Heavenly Father knows each of our weaknesses but He LOVES us anyway. He believes in you and in me! **HE'S OUR DAD!**

- This Heavenly Father desires a relationship with you and with me. **HE'S OUR DAD!**

When we understand that God is our Dad...then you see, it is easier and important to be like a child for

then we can have God as our Heavenly Father, the father we have always wanted.

So would you put your right hand in your daddy's and TRUST that His love is true? Be HIS child by surrendering control to Him. With your hand in HIS you can walk with a sense of wonder, a sense of curiosity and complete JOY because HE'S OUR DAD! Will you be His child?

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com