



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 14, 2018

The Humility of a Child (Hope Restored Series)

Pastor Dan Chun

Mark 10:13 *One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so He could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering Him.*

Mark 10:14 When Jesus saw what was happening, He was angry with His disciples. He said to them, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children."

Mark 10:15 I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

Mark 10:16 Then He took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them. (NLB)

Clearly the disciples did not understand Ohana Ministry! What a family scene from the Bible. Moms and dads are bringing their children to meet Jesus. They have heard that He is kind and loving, and that He probably loves children. They want Him to touch the children and bless them.

Imagine they saying, "Hey, look there's Jesus," and then go running towards Him. But the disciples, who in their thinking are often one taco short in a combination, see the kids and parents rushing towards Jesus, and shout, "Hey, hey you, yeah you kid and your mom and dads, what do you think you are doing? You think you can just rush up to us? Hey, Jesus is an important and busy man. Busy, busy, busy doing God's work. Parents, take your little rag muffins and ankle-biters and get outta

here. We're doing the Kingdom work, man. Quit bothering Him. No time for you and your keiki."

The Bible says the disciples SCOLDED the parents! They gave them heat! They didn't cool their jets. But when Jesus saw what was happening, the Bible says He got angry! And as onlookers we can think, "Oh no, here comes another one of those Come-To-Jesus talks!"

Jesus in essence says to His disciples – cut it out! Don't ever do that again! Let the children come to me. Don't ever stop keiki from coming to me, not ever!

And the disciples then say to the children, "Hey, boys and girls, just kidding! Come on over here. Can't you guys take a joke? Jesus would love to see you. We're just fishermen foolin' around!"

Then picture this: Jesus takes the children in His arms. What a loving and gentle picture. Then He places His hands on their heads and blessed them. This is such a touching, poignant moment in the life of Jesus. I wish I were there. It shows the tender heart of Jesus and what He's really about.

At the Global Headquarters of Compassion International in Colorado Springs, there's a statue in the main lobby that Compassion commissioned an artist to create for them. What statue do you think that is? A statue of the prodigal son? Jesus with a lamb on His shoulders? Jesus praying? No, they chose a statue of Jesus with children in His arms. But get this—they put a little

seat in the statue to encourage visitors to sit in Jesus' lap. And many do.

Twelve years ago I went to the headquarters with some pastors. Here is my friend Fernando Castillo, former pastor of C4 Church in Diamond Head, sitting in the lap of Jesus. (Photo of Pastor Fernando was shown.) When you sit on Jesus' lap, you want to get close to His face. But then you feel the Lord's love and you want to hug Him. Jesus draws you in. And you become humble like a child.

Today Pastor Fernando is a denominational leader of the Four Square Church, watching over many regions, including Hawaii, Utah, California, Nevada, and Arizona. See what happens when you humble yourself like a child?

I have a friend who owned a company in Fresno, CA, and he, being a Christian, wanted His employees and the community to know about his faith and trust in Jesus. He wanted to have a statue in the outside courtyard of his company entrance. And what scene did he choose? Jesus and the children.

Now why is this so important to Jesus and to us that He wanted to have access to children and that He deeply loved them? First, it is important for us to know that in the deepest part of the heart of Jesus –

1) Jesus really loves children.

Now we all know that children can be selfish, whiny, complaining at times, and feel it is all about them.

But Jesus looks past that and sees that wonderful core of innocence. He wants to bless them and protect them. He wants to be close to them. The children sensed this and wanted to be near Him.

Pope Francis told his priests around the world that they must not be distant from their congregation with their feet under their desks but to get out to be with them and love them. He said if you are the shepherds of your flock then you should “smell like sheep,” meaning you are with them in their workplace, home, and neighborhood that you should smell like the sheep in your flock. Jesus smells like children. He likes being with them.

2) Jesus wants to bless and protect keiki

Today’s passage says Jesus placed His hands on their heads and blessed them. During a prayer or a blessing, to place a hand on the head is the most sincere, intentional, holy way to ask for God’s intervention and blessing on a person. It’s sacred. Jesus wants the best for children. A blessing is to receive God’s best. He wants them to be protected by other humans all the time.

We live in a world where that is not always the case, is it? Many children have been abused by their relatives, friends, strangers, and, unfortunately, by religious people. But you need to know what Jesus thinks about that and how deep in His heart He is horrified.

In the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark, there is a passage we skipped so that I could bring it up today in the context of Jesus loving children. Here is what Jesus thinks of people who abuse children. He starts off with the standard of how children should be treated. And then the Lord gets really serious.

Mark 9:36 Then He (Jesus) put a little child among them. Taking the child in His arms, He said to them,

Mark 9:37 “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on My behalf welcomes Me, and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes

not only Me but also My Father who sent Me.

Mark 9:42 “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and were thrown into the sea.

If you are new to the Christian faith, know that Jesus rarely gets mad. He never gets mad at sinners who have led a bad life. But He DOES get mad at overly religious people because Jesus is not into religion but relationships. Religion, meaning it’s all about rules, rituals, regulations. He gets mad at people who think there is a rigid way to live like the Pharisees and Sadducees in the Bible. But He never gets mad at the so-called sinners, like embezzlers, adulterers, drunkards, and prostitutes. He doesn’t want them to live that way, but He does hang out with them and loves them.

In today’s Scripture passage, we see that Jesus gets angry with people who block children from Him. He gets intensely stern with anyone who harms a child, so much so that He uses an incredibly extreme hyperbole. He says if you cause a child to stumble or some version to sin, you would be better off being thrown into the sea with a large stone around your neck.

In the Bible we only see Jesus use extreme language when He feels the weak and the vulnerable, like children, are being harmed. He makes it really clear in the 25th Chapter of Matthew that if you are not loving to the weak and vulnerable like those who are hungry and thirsty in this world, and the imprisoned, the sick, the widow, the stranger to the land, you will go to eternal punishment.

Please note that it’s rare that Jesus says you go to hell, but He does say it when certain people are not helped or hurt. And today we see He adds to that list. If you ever cause a child to be hurt, Jesus

says your punishment will be quite severe if you don’t repent.

Now I want to look at this verse from a different perspective. Many people have caused pain to a child, but I want to address the many who have received pain as a child. Might be we had difficult parents or a difficult upbringing, and we were told lies like you will never amount to anything or you are not pretty or good looking or you are not smart.

That was true for actress Tiffany Haddish, as reported in her autobiography. She was abused by her parents, her stepparents, her grandparents, and foster parents who said and did horrible things to her physically, emotionally, and sexually. Lies like “you are ugly, stupid, and will never amount to anything” can cause us to stumble in life. We need to tell those voices to be quiet. They’re not from Jesus.

Some have been sexually abused as she was. You need to read today’s passage and know that Jesus loves you very much. And whatever you have gone through He stands with you in your corner. He is as upset as you. He hears and heard your cries.

And He is as mad as you because He said it will be WORSE for people who harm children than if they had a millstone around their neck and thrown in to the DEEPEST part of the sea. Ultimately He will deliver the justice you may not have received here on earth.

Jesus wants to help you. He wants to heal you. But you need to be open to allowing Him to get close enough to you to, in a sense, put His gentle, loving hand on you to bless you, help you, and heal you from your wounds.

A month ago, you heard a woman preach from this pulpit and say how difficult her life has been after being molested by a church employee in her father’s church that he pastored. As horrible as that crime was, she still chose not to leave the church.

In the end drew close to Jesus for His help. And when she got cancer twice and her son killed himself, she chose not to run away. She drew close to Jesus for His help. She chose health and real joy in the midst of pain, not apart from it. Her name is Kay Warren, and you can listen to her sermon on our website.

Jesus stands with you. Go to Him with your pain. Put your head on his chest. Draw near to Him. Jesus gets intensely angry with those who hurt children or cause them to stumble in life.

I should add, that if you have been someone who has hurt a child whether in upbringing or maybe you have some pain from another situation, you too can find help and healing in our loving Lord.

3) A child has awe and wonder of God.

Jesus saw in children an innocence that brings about an awe of God. Most children have no problem believing in God, especially if their parents or guardians give God a fair chance in their lives. Those parents who block children really are stumbling blocks if they don't want their kids to have the chance to intimately know Jesus. More people come to Christ before the age of 18 than at any other age.

That's why we invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in Ohana ministries in our church. We send people and spend money to help protect children overseas and locally who are sex trafficked and put in slavery. Our First Prez Bazaar that's coming in three weeks is partially meant to support ministries that fight sex trafficking of minors.

But there is something about children. If they know about Jesus, they will trust Him deeply because of their innocent nature. That's not my observation. That's the observation of Jesus. If we become like children, minus all of our sophistication as teenagers or adults, we will know the Kingdom of heaven and know Jesus more. Jesus said these words in the Gospel of Matthew.

Matt. 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Matt. 18:2 He called a little child, whom he placed among them.

Matt. 18:3 And He said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 18:4 Therefore, whoever takes a humble place—becoming like this child—is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 18:5 And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

You see, there is that humility theme that we started last week. If you can be humble like a child, you will actually be the greatest in heaven. And if we welcome children, we welcome Jesus into our midst. There is something about kids who cast away the sophistication that we adults have picked up, where it is not cool to have to ask God for help, or to submit our intelligence to Him.

Children don't have a lot of money to get prideful, or a lot of accomplishments to get puffed up, or a lot of titles or trophies at that point to think they are hot stuff and don't need God. We adults can think we don't need God and say, "I can take care of myself." But a childlike humility says, "Lord, I can't take it, and I need your help."

I want to end with a true story that happened a few weeks ago to a teenage friend of mine. She's not a little child, but she is young. You will see her child-like faith as a youth.

Her name is Corey. I've known her since she was a baby. Corey has gone through some pretty tough stuff, and I have her permission to share this. When she was a freshman in high school, she got a serious gastro intestinal bacterial infection called C. Diff. Pretty rare for a 14-year old to get that. It's extremely

painful. Causes weight loss. Makes it hard to eat. Nausea. It's a hard disease to beat and harder to keep away after you've had it once.

In her sophomore year, doctors discovered she had a tumor. It was removed in the fall. She got healthier, but still battled for most of her teenager years the affects of the C. Diff.

As a senior Corey was accepted to Berkeley this past spring as a chemistry major on the pre-med track. She was excited. Her dream was to be a physician. But just ten days before she was supposed to move into her dorm at Cal Berkeley, she got sick again. Doctors said the C. Diff had returned. She couldn't go to college. To make matters worse, Berkeley said they would take back her admission with no deferral due to her illness.

Later, after much prayer by family and friends, she was miraculously given a deferral for Berkeley so she could attend next year. But in fighting the illness and due to some other boyfriend issues, she fell into a deep depression and into kind of an existential crisis of faith.

For years she had a strong faith in Jesus, but at this time she had hit a wall. She, like maybe some of you today, was no longer sure if there was a God. Due to C. Diff and other things she had suffered so much over the years of her youth, she was at the end of her rope.

C. Diff causes much pain and nausea daily and she could not eat normally. Her boyfriend was probably not the best for her, and in many ways he was pulling her away from her desire to live for God and to be a doctor.

Three weekends ago she was in a pit of despair, so she went to Starbucks (where we all go when we are depressed!). But it was truly, seriously a deep depressing crossroads culminating in severe doubts. She was no longer sure if God was real.

She wondered if she had made a mistake committing to Berkeley, and whether she was smart enough to go to Berkeley. Maybe her wanting to be a doctor and her lifelong dream of going into medicine was just a myth. There was her boyfriend whom she knew he wasn't the best for her but couldn't break it off.

It was a dark night of the soul. She got out her notebook and started to journal what she sadly called her last prayer to God. In essence, she wrote this: "Look, I don't even know if You're real, so I'm not starting this with a dear God or ending it with an amen. But I feel like I'm losing it and if You're there, then You need to send me a burning bush, something I can't mistake for anything but You."

A burning bush prayer. To see God supernaturally as Moses did.

Now if I may break the story and say this: A few weeks ago I said we can't live lives asking for signs all the time, like if I see the wind blow a leaf left, I will go left; or if the plastic bag on my delivered newspaper is a certain way, that will be a sign. That would be superstition. We can't always be asking for signs. But I added that actually God always is communicating to us but we are not aware. Ah, yes, but a clear unmistakable burning bush prayer, that's a tough one. But there are times, like a child-like prayer, we need to send that out to God.

Back to Corey's story. When Corey finished that prayer in Starbucks she realized that she forgot to put money in the parking meter for her car. So she grabbed her journal and latte and went out to pay the meter. Then decided she wouldn't go back into Starbucks so instead she sat on a bench on the street put in her ear buds in and pulled out a novel to read.

It was around then she noticed a homeless man sitting at another bench up the street. For some reason she felt drawn to him, maybe even thinking whether she should buy him a cup of

coffee, which is something Corey had never done before. But she decided no. If he was still there after she read a bit, maybe she would do something.

Unbeknownst to her while she was reading, the homeless man drew closer and closer to her until he was right at her bench. He was covered with sores all over his face and body. His teeth were yellow and some were missing. His mustache was yellow. He wore like a yellow or tan or beige coat. He had a sore under his right eye. It was very dark, almost purple. But Corey said but for some reason he seemed beautiful, not repulsive. She pulled off her earphones to hear him ask, "How you doing?"

Corey replied, "All right, how about yourself?" To which he replied, "Good."

He then asked if she was in college. She replied, "Yes, or I will be."

He then said, "You're studying something hard." She said, "Yeah." And then he said, "You're studying medicine."

She was shocked. Later she had looked at her clothes to see if she was wearing a college t-shirt or reading a book that looked like college material but both were not true.

So, she asked, "How do you know?" He replied, "I just know."

And then he said, "You are going to be successful in college." Corey said, "Thank you."

And then he said, "You're going in the right direction; you are on the right path and so don't question anymore." Then he added, "Don't let anyone ever take that away from you."

She immediately thought of her boyfriend. She started to get teary eyed, and she didn't really know what to say and all she could get out was "thank you, you have no idea how much that means to me."

She got up to introduce herself and he said his name was Brian. She was about to shake his hand. It was then that she noticed even more sores that covered his whole body, his face, and his hands. He pulled back a sleeve to his jacket, which show even more sores, but then said, "Don't worry; I'm not dirty."

She said, "Don't worry about that" and then shook his hand. She offered to buy him lunch but he said that he had something to do and said, "God bless you," and hobbled off. Corey then went to her car and just sobbed.

With a last desperate plea from Starbucks, she asked for a burning bush answer from God to appear to her and talk to her, and she got it. Only if you have the awe and wonder of a child could you do that.

An hour later she called her boyfriend and called it off. She thought she would be devastated but she felt free though she still cares for him deeply.

Who was this homeless man? Puzzling and fascinating. Corey wanted to specialize as a doctor in infectious diseases and here was a man covered with sores who told her, "Don't worry I'm not dirty."

Was this God not only telling her to go to med school but you are in the right area of study? Who was Brian? Was He Jesus who got real close and intimate with a girl who felt vulnerable and was crying out for help? Was he an angel? The Bible says this in a book called Hebrews:

Heb. 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Why are we doing a Healing Service at the end of this month? Why do we encourage each other to pray and to learn how to hear God and be aware of Him, like in our Life in the Spirit Conference next month?

Because we believe if you have the humility of a child and have a sense of awe and wonder about Him, He will respond. He hears our every prayer and cry even when you doubt. And though it may not be as dramatic as Corey, I know He is always acting on our behalf, but sometimes we just don't see the Brians in our lives.

Jesus might be communicating to you and sending out His word of love or comfort through a book, maybe a church, a friend, a song, maybe even a sermon today, or a mysterious homeless man named Brian.

Or maybe you are the one who is to be used by God to share an encouragement or a word like Brian. You may think you are inadequate cause you have sores or might not look or feel good, but God could use you to be a Brian to someone who desperately needs strengthening, encouragement, or comfort.

By the way, if you look it up, the name Brian means "high or noble." Just saying.

For in Jesus Christ, we have a high and noble friend, the Lord and Savior who leads many an angel. Amen? Amen.

Let's pray.