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## **Children of the Kingdom**

### **Bible Reading: Luke 18:15-17**

#### ***Jesus blesses little children***

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. 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. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.'

#### **Reflection**

There is an old saying supposedly used in the acting profession, 'Never work with children or animals'. Having said that, some of the most interesting and fun times in my ministry has been working with young children in either Collective Worship, Messy Church or directly in their respective classes. It is a role that I love and have found over the years that children come out with some of the most profound of statements and that they can have a faith which would put some regular churchgoers to shame!

In this Gospel story, Luke tells us that people were 'bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them', but other translations say it was so that 'Jesus could bless' them. Luke is very much an artist and builds up the picture with layer on layer of paint until he produces a picture that we can all resonate with. In this case what Luke does is to paint a picture of humility and love. He emphasises how young the babies were that people were bringing to Jesus.

But it strikes me that children today need a tremendous amount of help, especially as they see the current coronavirus pandemic rampaging throughout the world. They certainly need that gentle, soothing touch of Jesus on their lives today! Being a child or young person at present can well be laden with anxiety and stress. Whilst youngsters are usually resilient under normal circumstances, these are not normal circumstances.

In normal times, most children view their school as a safe place; a place where they are with their friends; a place where they learn all sorts of different and exciting things. Imagine therefore having all this stability uprooted by trying to learn from home, sometimes with little or no technology to support this. Equally, in many rural areas, broadband facilities are woefully lacking. And let's spare a thought too for the mums and dads who suddenly became surrogate teachers, trying to help their children as they struggle with the whole concept of e-learning. Children, too, don't always relish the thought of Mum or Dad as a teacher. And so the pressures on them mount up.

Perhaps *some* of our churches need to change their attitude to children and families and be more inclusive. I am convinced that this attitude is not intentional, but due to a lack of understanding of the

needs of families today. Perhaps a rural church congregation, where it is possible, might make it feasible for work with children and families to be strengthened or even to start afresh.

I reckon that one of the many blessings to come out of the Coronavirus pandemic, might be that God wants us to welcome and bless people that we don't get on with too well. Do we have God's warm-heartedness towards children? Are we – like God – eager to encourage, welcome and bless little children?

Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' Thoughts for us to dwell on at this time in our own journeys.

## Prayer

Loving God, may we again become as little children,

so that you might surround each one of us with your welcoming arms of love.

Keep us, good Lord,

under the shadow of your mercy

in this time of uncertainty and distress.

Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,

and lift up all who are brought low;

that we may rejoice in your comfort

knowing that nothing can separate us from your love

in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Amen.**     *(Prayer from the Church of England website, as amended)*

## Response

In prayer, we need to think of all those children who are suffering at this time being in lockdown, trying to do home schooling, often without the proper resources such as laptops and tablets and particularly in rural areas, the lack of broadband. We should also remember all those in these difficult times of pandemic, both children and parents, suffering stress, anxiety and an absolute fear of contracting the disease.

If we are fortunate enough to have grandchildren, why not spend more time with them virtually (if broadband and technology permits) to try and restore some normality into their lives? We might like to listen to them read their school reading books or even pray with them.

Perhaps we might be able to become involved in an organisation that supplies pre-owned laptops and tablets to children through our local schools.

Do we, as the prayer above suggests, need to reflect on how we might become 'as little children' in our daily lives and perhaps talk to others about this?

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