

I probably should be getting used to this by now, but I still get amazed, at the way God seems to constantly make these messages line-up with what's going on in life...

We don't have a very complex preaching plan in this place – we just work our way through whole books of the Bible. We begin at the beginning, we work our way through it, and then we end at the end...

Occasionally, I do take things a bit out of order. Alright, so at the moment, we're working our way through the Gospel of Mark, but:

- on Palm Sunday, we did jump forward to where Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem.
- On Good Friday, we did skip forward to the crucifixion of Jesus...
- We had a bit of trouble on Christmas Day, because the Gospel of Mark doesn't tell us anything about the birth of Jesus...

But apart from seasonal stuff like (Easter & Christmas), we just work our way through whatever book we're studying... And it is amazing, how often, God brings stuff up, at just the right time...

e.g.

Early last month, was when 'freedom of speech' became a national issue, because Israel Folau posted something on social media about "Hell"... And guess what the Bible reading for that week was about – Jesus talked about "Hell", and so we could just address it, right there – "What do we believe about Hell?" ...

But most of the time, I don't even know about it, until somebody comes up to me after church, and says, "Wow, that message was just for me today, because this happened during the week."

So, here we are today...

I **did** know, Sammy's dedication was coming up (Robyn put it in my diary)... and I was actually a bit worried about it, because I **also** knew that in this section of Mark, there's some really tough stuff – there's some really confronting and heavy teaching, that we could very well encounter, on the day of Sammy's dedication... So I was a bit worried about it...

But when you see the Bible reading we landed on today... Most of you probably think I planned it this way... No – I'm not that clever – we've just continued (week by week) on this path, and this is where we've landed today...

So, let's read today's reading:

Mark 10:13-16

What a perfect reading for a dedication.

If we didn't know any better, we might conclude, "Oh, that's an interesting coincidence..." But when this sort of thing seems to happen all the time, you realise, "No, it's not a coincidence – it's a God-incidence."

Sammy, The Lord has a special message for you today, and it's a special message for all of the Children – Jesus loves; welcomes; and blesses, little children.

And the Lord has a special message for adults today ... - Be like the kids... There's no great academic leap required, to become a Christian – it's just a matter of receiving the Kingdom of God, with the faith of a child...

Isn't God good,, that for this day of dedication of a child,, our word for today is: **"Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."**

Righto:

The people were bringing their kids to Jesus, for Him to touch them... The sort of touch we're talking about, is described in v16: ¹⁶ **And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.**

One of the great sadnesses of our broken world, has been the perversion of touch...

- A simple hug can be more effective to console the grieving, than a thousand words;
- Physical contact with the outcast, lets them know, "Hey, I'm with you – I'm not rejecting you."

- A crying child just needs to be enveloped in somebody's arms to be consoled...
- The lonely needs someone to come up beside them, and hold them on the shoulder, to let them know, "Hey, you're **not** alone..."

But sometimes, when simple, innocent, consoling touch is exactly what's needed,,,, we avoid it. Because 'touch' has been so perverted, as a society, we've come to a position where we're afraid to touch (in case allegations get made against us)... And yet it remains one of our basic human needs – to be touched...

At the moment, I look around, and I feel like I'm surrounded by teachers, and I'm talking about stuff that, compared to you lot, I know nothing about ... I rang my cousin during the week (also a teacher, and involved in some child care centres) –

*And she told me how there **was** a period where pretty-much all touch was discouraged, but now the experts realise something that we always knew: 'touch' is something that's very much needed.... And it's often the ones who are hardest to love, who need the love most... And there **are** ways that we can safely share touch, without being inappropriate:*

- *On the back (Above the waste)*
- *A sideways hug;*
- *A pat on the head, or a rub on the head;*
- *A High-5*

And (very importantly) only ever share touch, if there's other adults around...

Jesus often touched those whom He healed... *My infection-control-qualified wife, probably cringes at the fact that Jesus constantly 'broke infection-control policy' – He had a habit of touching people who had infectious diseases – the untouchables – people who, everyone else (by law) refused to touch... And yet, Jesus touched them.*

But, when the people brought their kids to Jesus, it seems like the disciples tried to shoo them away... The disciples rebuked them... They disapproved that these kids were being brought to Jesus... We're not told why... I think most of us have probably heard that it was because they thought Jesus' time shouldn't be wasted on little kids... Maybe... Don't know...

But the point is, this is yet another instance, in a long line of instances, where the disciples had it completely wrong – The disciples seemed to be constantly on a very different page to what Jesus was...

And when Jesus saw what the disciples were doing, He was quite **indignant**...

“Why would you do something like that????” That’s how I picture indignation.

“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, [and then our version says:] for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

In the Greek, it literally says: “for such as these, is the Kingdom of God.”

....

Can I borrow a child for a minute??? How important is a child? “for such as this little fella, is the Kingdom of God.”

Isn't it amazing? Kids just want to grow up, don't they...
How often do we hear a child being described as 8 going on 18???

When I was a kid, all I wanted to do, was grow up. Why??
It's because every year, just over the next age hurdle, there was:

- more responsibility;
- greater autonomy;
- more things I was allowed to do...
 - a bigger motorbike I was allowed to ride;
 - a bigger gun I was allowed to shoot;
 - a bigger piece of machinery I was allowed to operate

It's part of growing up, and when you're a kid, you want to grow up as fast as you can...

But as we grow up into adults, it's important that we don't lose sight of the nature of the Kingdom of God...

You see, we sometimes get it into our heads, that when our kids get old enough, that's when they'll understand enough, to become a follower of Jesus – like it couldn't possibly happen, until they've developed a bit more maturity... But you know

what? – Jesus just throws all that on its head... Jesus didn't come just for adults... The Kingdom of God, **is** such as these... (Children are the future of the church / the children are the church)

We've just endured yet another long, tedious election campaign... And I am surprised that politicians still do the 'kiss the baby' thing...

What is it with politicians – kissing a baby; or visiting a pre-school, for the obligatory photo op... I think it's supposed to give an air that:

- *this person is someone who's caring;*
- *This person is interested in you; and*
- *he's interested in your family...*

Rubbish... Once the election's over and the cameras have moved on, most of them aren't really interested in your kids at all... Ring your local member up to let him know well little Johnny's done in the spelling Bee this week, and see how interested he is...

Politicians don't really want to be involved in your family – it's a photo-op...

But Jesus isn't like politicians... Jesus loves; welcomes; and blesses, little children. Jesus genuinely cares about kids. In fact, He says: such as these, **is** the Kingdom of God....

Here at Bush Disciples – the Bush Kids Sunday School is just as important as whatever else we do... And that's why so many of you are involved in teaching Sunday School, because such as these kids, **is** the Kingdom of God...

And isn't it wonderful, that today, we've got a living, breathing example, of parents (Jake and Lauren), bringing their child (little Sammy), to dedicate Him to God... I know, as parents, it would seem impossible to you, that anyone could love Samuel as much as you do, but Jesus loves him more...

But then Jesus went on to say something really profound:

15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

Let me tell ya – that's a real stumbling block for some people... We have here, a picture of a child-like faith – the unquestioning **trust**, that a child places in an adult they love...

I reckon, about the most ashamed I've ever felt, was when I unintentionally betrayed the unquestioning trust of my child...

When Ben was a little boy, he had a haircut, and he ended up with a piece of hair stuck in his mouth, and he couldn't get it out... And he came to me and he told me his problem, and he said "Dad, I've tried this, and I've tried that, and I've rinsed my mouth out, and I just can't get it out of my mouth." ...

And I was doing something else, and I fobbed him off with a bit of a joke, “Did you use soap?” ... “No”, and he wandered off... A couple of minutes later, he was back, yagh... “What’s wrong Ben?” “Soap tastes awful...”

And I felt terrible,,, “Oh Ben, I’m so sorry – I was joking with you... I thought you knew.” And I felt terrible. I was deeply; deeply ashamed, that I betrayed the trust of a little boy, who trusted me so implicitly...

But does that give you a picture, of what the trust of a little child is like??? Straight-forward, unquestioning trust, in the one who loves them and cares for them... That’s the sort of trust that we need to have in Jesus... And it’s OK to have that sort of trust in Jesus, because Jesus isn’t like me – He doesn’t betray trust like I did...

But for some people, that’s the barrier, right there... In their perceived intellect, they reckon they know better... They believe they’re above that sort of trust... To them, a child-like trust, is childish (and not in a good way) – it’s naïve; simpleminded...

I talked with a man once, who’s been in the church all his life, and he said to me, “I no longer believe in the God I was taught about in Sunday School” ... He was very proud of himself... And then he went on to tell me about how he’s discovered a very different God – not at all like the God who reveals Himself in the Bible.

To him, the god that he believed in when he was younger, is nothing but a fairy tale... “You can’t expect me to believe that

any more – I’m not a little child anymore – I’ve moved on from that...”

And my heart breaks for him, because he lost the unquestioning trust in God, that he once had... Jesus takes a child in His arms, and says “Such as these, is the Kingdom of God...” *And yet, that man was proud, that he’d had grown out of it...*

According to Jesus, the **only** way to receive the Kingdom of God, is **like** a little child...

In what way did He mean? Childish? Naïve? No...

What are the characteristics of a little child?

Well firstly, they’re totally dependent. We need to be totally dependant upon God...

If I don’t think I need Jesus – If I’m **independent**, and **self-sufficient**, I’m not even going to pursue God – why would I ever receive the Kingdom of God.

And secondly, a child has straight-forward, unquestioning trust, in the one who loves them and cares for them...

When the Bible talks about ‘faith’, that’s what it’s talking about – having a straight-forward, unquestioning trust, in the one who loves us and cares for us...

It’s strange, you know, as we get older, we develop these skins; shells; - let’s call it “layers of protection”, that we build up around ourselves, because we’ve been hurt by people;

we've been taken advantage of by people, and so we build up all these protective layers:

- cynicism;
- scepticism;
- distrust;
- sarcasm;
- suspicion

And we have these layers to try and protect ourselves... In more extreme cases, it's topped off with a good dose of narcissism, that makes us feel that we're on top of it...

And all of these layers, that we build up to protect ourselves, are exactly what keeps us from the Kingdom of God... Here we are - We're trying desperately, to protect ourselves from being hurt, and what are we doing? We shut out the very one, who can heal us; We shut out the very one, who is our hope...

Jesus kept it pretty simple for us: ¹⁵ **Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."**

Sometimes on Christian radio, I hear presentations by brilliant men – Christian apologists like Ravi Zacharias; John Lennox; - these blokes debate some of the world's most brilliant and renowned atheists, and they hold their ground... And it's all very impressive... (It's not only simple people like me who believe in Jesus...)

But you know what??? Even for brilliant men like that, following Jesus all boils down to a simple child-like trust... At the end of the day, that's all they've got going for them.

- That's all I've got going for me – a simple child-like trust in Jesus...
- And that's all I have to offer you...
 - I can't make you believe;
 - I can't debate you into believing,,,

But I can invite you to trust in Jesus – to give up:

- scepticism;
- distrust;
- suspicion

and to begin to experience the Kingdom of God...

And what a blessing that is... Jesus took the children in His arms, He laid his hands on them, and He blessed them...

What's a blessing???

A blessing, is....: how do I describe it? Well, it's a blessing...

- May the Lord watch over you...
- May the God of Peace, **fill** you with His peace;
- May the Lord fill you with His Spirit, and lead you in His paths of righteousness...

They're all examples of blessings...

And we want our kids to be blessed, don't we??? But you do realise, "A blessing can only be found in God, hey????
Anything else is just wishful thinking...

Imagine, if I don't believe in God, what kind of blessing could I even give my kids??? I hope things will go well for you...

“Gee, thanks Dad... Are you still hoping to win Gold Lotto too???” “Yeah, that too...” “Arhhh.. Righto”..

In Jesus Christ, “blessing” means something, and what a privilege it is, to **be** blessed, and to be **able** to bless...

Let’s pray:

Lord,
We want to thank You,
that You are the God in whom we can trust.
You are completely dependable;
Completely trustworthy;
You are Just; Reliable;
And You have the power to keep us,

Lord, we pray for our children today:
We thank You, that you Love and bless little children;
It is so amazing to us,
that the creator of the universe, cares for little kids...

And Lord, we praise you,
For your kingdom is **not** made up of:

- the rulers;
- the mighty;
- the invincible

Your Kingdom is for those who have nothing to offer,
but our simple trust in You.

Lord, I think of a man who encountered Jesus in this same Gospel of Mark, who said, “I believe, help my unbelief.”

He echoes what so many of us feel...
We believe. Help our unbelief.
We trust You... Help our distrust of You...

We trust You a little bit.
Help us to trust You more...

Lord,
We offer ourselves to you,
In our simple child-like faith.
And Lord, we pray for a blessing:

Make us into the people You want us to be,
That we would follow the paths, that You would guide us to
walk;

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.