

**“Children’s Image of God”
Matthew 19:13-15**

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I have often wondered why they did it. Why did the disciples rebuke those who brought their children to Jesus and try to prevent them from spending some time with him?

I must give them the benefit of the doubt. I think they were trying to protect Jesus. It appeared that Jesus had been busy fielding some tough questions from the Pharisees and was probably exhausted. Evidently, the disciples felt it best not to interfere with the dialogue between Jesus and his adversaries, but they decided they could prevent the parents and their children from getting to Jesus and give him some much needed rest.

I’ve seen this happen in the political world many times, haven’t you? It is not uncommon for the president’s advisors to come between him and the press and cut off discussion as they move the president toward his car or a secluded room. Perhaps the disciples were assuming this role for Jesus that day.

You know what Jesus did, though, don’t you? He instructed his disciples to move aside so the children could come to him. After he spent time with them, he went on his way.

Why is it so important that children come to Jesus? They have the same needs that adults do. They need meaning, purpose, guidance, direction, peace, security, courage, confidence, hope, patience, wisdom, understanding, love and forgiveness. Just because they are small and young doesn’t mean that their basic and most important needs are different from people who are larger and older. Children need Jesus as much as adults do. Jesus knew that.

Who should bring children to Jesus? Who brought them in this story? Matthew doesn’t say but I think that was because he assumed his readers knew it was their parents. Parents in that culture took the religious training of their children very seriously. We should, too.

I am still haunted by the words of the evangelist who said, “When you die and meet God, the first question He will ask you is if you brought your children with you. Will they be coming?” That’s a heavy question, isn’t it?

This morning, I want to tell you someone else who has been ushering children into the presence of Jesus. It is our Children’s Minister, Sue Laird. All her life, Sue has been bringing children to Jesus and for the last twenty-nine years she has been doing it at our church. Today, we recognize and honor her for her efforts. We also thank God for bringing her our way. What a difference she has made in the lives of so many families.

It is important that children see God as accessible and approachable. They need to see Him as a friend and helper, someone who loves and cares for them. Sue has revealed that kind of God to them and I am grateful she has.

Do you recall as a child how you were informed that a policeman was your friend? Some of our earliest schoolbooks had pictures of policemen and stories of how they helped children. Why was that necessary? Perhaps it was because policemen looked

so intimidating and unapproachable in their uniforms. They actually looked scary, didn't they?

I believe God has needed a little marketing in our society, too. Many have depicted Him as mean, angry, vindictive and belligerent, waiting to catch you doing something wrong so He can punish you. How approachable is that God to a child?

Is that the image that God wants a child to have of Him? Is that the image of God revealed in Matthew 19:13-15? Hardly.

Thank you, Sue, for giving our children a healthy image of God, for helping them to respect God but not be afraid of Him. That may be your greatest legacy among us. I can think of no better.