

**“LET THE LITTLE ONES IN” (8/22/10)**

**SCRIPTURES:** Jeremiah 1: 4-10 & Luke 18: 15-17

**KEY CONCEPTS:** Jesus’ dominion was radically inclusive of people that “the world” readily excluded – how does this core value impact how we “do church” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**OPENING ILLUSTRATION:**

Over the years, I’ve heard all kinds of illustrations about how you can know about people’s character depending on how they act in certain situations. I heard one story once that recounted how you can know a person’s character based on how they respond/relate to the following:

- Lost car keys (or any keys for that matter)
- An umbrella that won’t open on a rainy day
- Lost luggage at a busy airport (or any airport for that matter)
- Elderly people
- Crying children – or children in general

In the coming week, I’m sure each of us will have ongoing opportunities with one or more of these sometimes stressful situations that throw us out of our comfort zone. In today’s readings, we’ll look specifically at “the little ones” – children in the literal form AND “the least of these” people in a broader sense. And my question to us all – as we continue to seek God’s vision for our personal lives AND our collective church life is this,

***“How does Jesus’ radical inclusion of people that “the world” readily excludes impact our personal & collective core values as Christians & as a faith community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?”***

**WILL YOU PRAY WITH ME?**

**PRAYER:**

**OHMCC ANNIVERSARY ILLUSTRATION:**

As I shared with you last week during communion, when Our Hope MCC first began in August 1999, I had a dream, a vision if you will, that reminded me of why we were even starting a Metropolitan Community Church in Athens, GA. The dream was set outdoors in a beautiful field & there was of a long communion table with fresh bread & glasses filled with juice. Just before we began the worship service, I began to notice that most of the loaves of bread were missing; had been partially eaten & were disappearing faster than you could imagine.

At first, I was shocked & really concerned because we didn’t have extra bread for such a huge crowd. We, then, discovered what was happening to the bread. Underneath the tables were dozens of children – of all ages, ethnicities, genders, etc. - & they were eating the bread & laughing & playing & basically being themselves.

And in that moment in the dream, everything was exactly as it needed to be! Nothing mattered except the full inclusion of those children into whatever we would do both in the dream AND in real life. So, here we are – over 11 years later – still living into not only allowing literal & figure children to “sit underneath our communion table” to eat bread, laugh, play & be themselves. But we are ALSO continuing our work of progressive Christian inclusion – asking people to “come out from under the table” & eat openly, honestly & with joy at the table of Jesus Christ.

**HEBREW READING – JEREMIAH 1: 4-10:**

I have always loved this reading from the book of Jeremiah. I have read it throughout my life – as I tried to discern God’s vision for my life, as a vocational minister & also when I was working through family issues regarding my birth father & my Dad. During my turbulent year regarding my Dad/Father, I found comfort in verse 5

***Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.***

How would our lives change if we “got this verse” & allowed this verse to live in us? No matter who our parents are (or are not); no matter is our mother or our father disowned us, judged us or hurt us – there IS someone who knew us even before we knew ourselves – that knew us intimately & saw something great in us – so great in fact, that even before we were born, God had a vision, a plan, an appointment for us?

Since my Dad’s death in April, I’ve returned again to this verse to remind myself that I am not alone. And that there’s always been someone who was with me (& will continue to be with me) even though my human father is gone. God, my Divine Father/Mother, is with me no matter what happens, no matter who dies or who lives. God knows me – And you, too!

**ONLINE:** This passage recounted Jeremiah’s call to ministry. Some key facts include:

- Jeremiah – “the Lord exalts” was the son of a priest
- Scholars think Jeremiah was probably born around 627 BCE, dying in 586 BCE presumably in Egypt
- Key realities during Jeremiah’s ministry: Babylon & its threat to Judah; Babylonian invasion & subsequent destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 586; the exile.
- Scholars think this book has been edited over time; with differences from the non-Hebrew text (Septuagint tradition).
- Jeremiah’s preaching focused on the covenant relationship between God & the peoples of Israel & Judah. Jeremiah was influenced by the prophet, Hosea.
- Despite the unfaithfulness of the people, Jeremiah still foretold of a “future & a hope for them” based on God’s commitment & faithfulness to them & the covenant.
- ***Jeremiah 1: 4-10:*** God’s identification of a task & a calling to be God’s agent; the person’s excuse; God’s promise to be with the person; God’s proof/sign & eventually the person says “yes” (or “no”). This is similar to Moses’ call (Exodus 4: 10-12).

**GOSPEL READING – LUKE 18: 15-17:**

Three short verses that articulate Jesus’ view & core values regarding children/infants. Jesus’ words regarding the inclusion of children appear in all 3 of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 19: 16-30; Mark 10: 13-16) & here in Luke 18.

This short story is sandwiched between two less desirable parables: The parable of the Pharisee & the tax collector & the parable of the rich, young ruler. The inclusion of infants into Jesus’ day may have been a highlight for Him since infants/children were so innocent, humble & adorable. The Pharisee, on the other hand, was self-righteous & the rich, young (& foolish) ruler was self-satisfied: hardly the people or the qualities that Jesus desired to build His kingdom/dominion on.

**GENERAL APPLICATION:**

So, what are the 21<sup>st</sup> century lessons for us – as we continue to seek God’s vision/purpose

here at Our Hope MCC & in our own personal lives? Personally, I have come believe that what we set as core values in our personal lives will have a direct effect on what does or does not occur collectively here at Our Hope MCC.

Will we be like the **mothers (& maybe the fathers)** in the story from Luke? Will we “bring the little ones” to Jesus & to worship here at OHMCC? Will we make sure that our literal “little ones” as well as our figurative “little ones” have full access & inclusion to the good news of Jesus the Christ?

And not to oversimplify “including little ones” in our lives & at OHMCC...it **IS** hard work – at times – to make sure we’re fully inclusive. And yet, it IS a core value of Christ – whom we follow.

### **SPECIFIC APPLICATION:**

So, how do we let the little ones in here at Our Hope MCC? Specifically, we DO need to consider how to restart our children’s church. Our children need to have “their place” to learn, play, grow & even crawl under the tables – if they need/want to.

The hold up? Enough volunteers to staff the weekly gathering during worship from approximately 11:10 – 11: 45 AM. Most of our current volunteers are stretched too thinly already, so we need either (a) several students in elementary education who want to volunteer/serve in this way; (b) a combination of students, parents & church volunteers to commit to a 2 person shift one Sunday a month; (c) a grant writer to write a grant to secure money in order to pay someone to be in charge of our children’s ministry every week.

### **CLOSING:**

In closing, I DO realize that for some of you, children truly are NOT your forte. Not to worry...because there are plenty of ways for you to plug in here at OHMCC to be inclusive of the “little ones” that is not actually children, but rather are the marginalized of our community.

**Spiritual humility**, which is often modeled by children or people, allows us to be open to all types of people that are placed in our lives. Spiritual humility is indeed a highly desired core value in Jesus’ dominion.

**Self-righteousness**, which leads to one being judgmental of others, & **self-satisfaction**, which causes us to think more highly of ourselves than we need to, however, are NOT qualities that are congruent with Jesus’ call to be inclusive of all people.

**Following Christ** calls for each of us to subdue or subjugate our “self” at times. Following Christ also means we are called to be more selfless, even as we become surer of ourselves & our place in God’s vision.

Therefore, how will your life embody Jesus’ call to radical inclusion of “the little ones” who have been ignored, oppressed or mistreated by the world & its systems? What will we do as Christ’s 21<sup>st</sup> century Church?