

“Becoming Bread for Children”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

World Communion Sunday

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Today’s gospel text is taken from the book of Mark, chapter 10, verses 13 through 16. I’ll be reading from the *Common English Bible*. People were bringing children to Jesus so that he would bless them. But the disciples scolded them. When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said to them, “Allow the children to come to me. Don’t forbid them, because God’s kingdom belongs to people like these children. I assure you that whoever doesn’t welcome God’s kingdom like a child will never enter it.” Then he hugged the children and blessed them.

This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray. God we trust you have prepared our hearts to receive. Transform our thinking and doing as we celebrate our differences and look to you. Amen.

I spent the first few years of my life growing up in small towns in Ohio. My father hadn’t yet settled into a career so we lived many different places. When I was in third grade I remember one day in particular. I got into the school bus and sat down next to a frail looking girl who was a bit dirty. I asked her what her name was, and she said “Grace.” I’d never heard that name before. She seemed different from most kids I’d met. She was quiet and seemed ashamed—years later—I realized it was the poverty she lived in that caused her to hang her head. Grace said her family lived on a dirt floor, and they had no running water. On most nights the family went to bed still hungry.

As the school year progressed I sat with Grace a few more times on the school bus. Once she spoke of the love of God and how she knew Jesus loved her.

She said he was caring for their family, and she knew everything would be okay. It was talking with this little girl that I was introduced to Jesus' love for the poor. Grace was a marginalized child. She was disregarded and broken, but her faith was strong. I could see it. She placed her hope in God. I never forgot her story.

Children approach us simply and just as they are. They don't put on any airs, they're small, powerless, and they have no superiority in the world. They're dependent on us for everything. The poor, like Grace, can be ignored and passed over. They are the dispossessed of society.

In the text Guy read this morning, the disciples scold the women who have brought their children to be blessed by Jesus. It was the culture of the day to see children as a nuisance when they were around certain people. The disciples saw Jesus as an important man. They didn't want him to be bothered or distracted. So here we have the disciples scolding the women and then we have Jesus scolding the disciples. What's going on?

In the ninth chapter of Mark the disciples are arguing about who will be the greatest in the kingdom of God. Jesus corrects their thinking and says, "Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all. Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me." These verses are the springboard and understanding for today's text.

Who is it that enters into the kingdom of God? Jesus says it's the least of these—the children—the poor—the disregarded. Jesus is saying that it's the least regarded in our community who should be our models for discipleship; this is a new way of thinking for the disciples. They're used to honoring the greatest and feeling greater themselves because they know someone who's famous and commands respect and is respected.

Jesus is hitting this point home to us today. For children, especially poor children and the marginalized in our community, God isn't experienced in power but in weakness. Jesus states that the way to enter into God's kingdom is as a child would—trustingly, feeling our need, and being receptive to the things of God. For us, entering God's kingdom is a way to identify with the least as Jesus did.

What I learned from the young girl Grace when I was 7 years old was this. Grace experienced God's love in her life in her weakness; this is how she entered into God's kingdom. Grace was receptive to God because of her weakness not her power, or money, or self-sufficiency, or high position, or education. For most of us, we enter into God's kingdom and we find a way to identify with the least of these, just as Jesus did. In this text, we find a way to become bread for children.

Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday. We celebrate our differences. We celebrate the interdenominational initiative that's aimed at achieving a greater cooperation among Christian denominations. All over the world people from all walks of life are celebrating the goodness of God. They worship God differently, pray differently, and preach differently.

We come to the Lord's Table together. We remember and thank God for caring for creation and sustaining it. We remember what Christ has done for us and our families and we rejoice in our salvation. We rejoice and look forward to the future reign of Christ. We're strengthened by eating the bread and drinking the juice as the body of Christ and his shed blood strengthens us for service in the church and in our community.

At this table everyone is welcome and there's room for the whole world. We're all in need of the love and grace of God. It's at this magnificent table where we eat together and acknowledge the living presence of Christ among us. Here we remember that Christ also gives us space at this table to grieve. And in our grief,

we can feel a stirring inside of joy, and we remember how very much God loves us. Our joy is reawakened in our sorrow, if only for a moment—despite the sorrow and sadness we feel.

When we leave this place of worship today, let's not hoard the added strength that Christ has given us. Let's allow the spiritual sustenance we received to carry us to a place where we welcome all people from all places. Let's share our finances as God would lead. And let's rejoice in the diversity that others bring to the Lord's Table. Use the strength provided by the Lord to go into the world in the strength of God's spirit and to give of ourselves and of our resources to the poor children.

Let's pray. Loving and compassionate God, stimulate within us a need to give to those who are in need. Move within us to share what we have and give to children who feel as though they've been forgotten. Let our gift instill in them the knowledge that God lives and reigns in this world. As disciple's of Christ, rouse our spirits to try to imagine how the powerless and the vulnerable poor children feel. Help us to have a mind and heart that feels compassion for the needs of others as we become the hands and the feet of Christ. Amen.

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

“Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me”