

TFTD 23.23
Matt 18.1-14

Monday March 20th
Like a little child



Jesus said, Whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18.4

Jesus took children seriously. He watched them playing in the street. He gave them his blessing. He knew how chaotic and tormented a child's life can be, and brought healing and peace. In this, the fourth of his great teaching discourses, Matthew has brought together a series of Jesus' sayings about children.

Jesus' world was not a child-centred world — far from

it. Children were small and insignificant, powerless and dependent. So by putting a child in the midst of this group of squabbling adults (vv.1-2), Jesus demonstrates the upside-down values of the kingdom. You want to know who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Well, let's start with the smallest. In God's kingdom, it's the smallest and weakest who are the most important (1 Cor 1.18ff).

But Jesus doesn't just use children to make a point. He's acutely aware of their vulnerability. Lurking in the shadows behind this story is the terrible story of Herod's massacre of the innocent children of Bethlehem (Matt ch.2), "collateral damage" to appease a tyrant's dynastic ambitions. And that's not just ancient history: we see it in the Ukraine, in the Yemen, in Palestine — even in our own country. Whatever the crisis (war, climate change, recession) — all over the world, it puts families under pressure and the smallest suffer most. But in the kingdom of heaven, no-one, however small, is insignificant: all are persons, immortal souls, loved and valued in God's eyes.

No excuses, then. Jesus' words are stern and uncompromising to any adult who abuses the trust of the little ones they should be protecting. And it's not just physical violence or neglect. There are more subtle ways of corrupting innocence, of leading astray. Jesus' words are a warning to all of us — parents, teachers, grandparents — to think carefully about what our

children are learning from the way we treat them — or the way we live our lives.

This word makes a wall of fire about them; he that touches them, touches the apple of God's eye. (Matthew Henry)

God of compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself: strengthen us in our daily living, that in joy and in sorrow we may know the power of your presence to bind together and to heal; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, AMEN

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