

## Little ones: Mark 9.30-50

Thanks to Anna for today's TFTD.



*He took a little child and put it among them, and taking it in his arms...*

What must it have been like for that little child to be held in the arms of Jesus? This one child gets embraced by the Son of God — they get hugged by the messiah — a small child is cradled in the arms of the one who was and is and is to come!!!

I wonder if the child knew they were in the arms of someone special at that moment or whether they were a bit confused as to what was going on; suddenly they were the centre of attention and being held by the person they had come to see. I wonder if that child felt something of the love and peace of God in that moment, as the large, adult-sized arms surrounded their mini child-sized frame? I wonder what it must have felt like?

When holding the child, Jesus says *“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...”*

Jesus is using the child as a visual teaching aid. He has picked the smallest and weakest person present. The person that the society of the time said was worth the least and said *“whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all”* last behind *even* this child, servant to *even* this child! This child needs constant care, practical care, emotional care, spiritual care; this child needs everything doing for it and in return, this child can't help you with anything, they can't work for you, they can't give back to you.

This was a lesson in humility for the disciples. They had been arguing about who among them was the greatest, who was the best disciple! I can imagine Jesus sighing, shaking his head a little, and having one of those small smiles on his face — the smile that says what you are arguing about is so off the mark, it's a little funny. Jesus had just tried to explain, again, to them that he was going to die; that this journey they were on was going to come to an end, things were going to change in a big way, and the miracles they had seen were nothing compared to what was to come....

And they were arguing about which one of them was the best!!

It's like Sunday league footballers in the park arguing over who is the best footballer, standing next to Messi or Ronaldo. It's like the winner of a park run comparing medals to Mo Farah or Paula Radcliffe. Or someone getting a speeding ticket thinking they could compete with Lewis Hamilton. (That is the end of my sporting knowledge!) The disciples wondering who the best is — standing next to Jesus! Jesus had sent them out in pairs to teach and gave them authority over evil spirits (6:7) but it looks like their success had gone to their heads.

So Jesus picks up a child and hugs them, showing the disciples just how off the mark they are. To make his point Jesus would have had to welcome the child, treated the child with love and care, not just a visual aid. Jesus didn't pick the child out of the crowd

as some politicians do at election time, hoping for a nice photo op, but ending up with a scared looking child in their arms. Jesus was showing the disciples that the child was important to him and ultimately he was going to die for that child.

A little later, Jesus says not only are the disciples to welcome the child and be servant to the child but also to protect the child. He says *“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea”*(v.42). I wonder if the disciples still weren't quite getting it, that they needed some seriously exaggerated language. Jesus goes on to say the famous passage about removing body parts so you don't get thrown into Hell. This is Jesus really trying to hammer it home, this is important — don't do stuff that will harm a little one's faith!!

Little ones mean children and young people, but also those young in faith. In verses 38-40 Jesus reprimands the disciples, who had tried to stop someone, who wasn't a follower of Jesus, from trying to exorcise a demon. Someone had heard that Jesus' name was powerful, they might not have known anything else but they thought they would give it a go. It might be like people praying before a driving test or an exam just in case it helps. Jesus says *“No-one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me”* v.39. If the people find the prayer helped (or the exorcism worked), they are closer to faith but if someone told them they had no right to pray because they weren't already a Christian then those people are the people who have put a stumbling block in front of little ones and it would be better for them to have a millstone put around their neck and thrown out to sea!

Jesus is trying to make it clear that the most important thing for Christians to do is to make sure they don't become someone who stops others from finding the wonders of faith. If they find some part of their lives hurts others even if it isn't bad in itself they should stop it or get rid of it (like Paul talking about eating meat sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians).

This is Jesus explaining the hard bit of loving your neighbour. If for some reason, something that you love, gets in the way of someone else (a little one) coming to faith- Jesus says to put the person first and give up the thing. Love people more than power, money, status, golf, music, gardening, cars, red wine, [insert thing you love most].

This should be the thing that sets us apart from others - we live with humility, we put others first doing what we can do to help others find that faith in Jesus that we have. Because we know that the best place to be is in the arms of Jesus. Just like that little child embraced by the Son of God, welcomed by him, the one who loves us so much that he gave up his life that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. This is where we want to be, but we also want everyone else to join us.

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