

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Christian Education Sunday  
February 7, 2021  
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran  
***Let the children come!***

— Matthew 19:13-15

Children have many needs. If you are a parent, you know that your child has so many needs and yet it's a joy to be able to meet those needs. However, for first time parents, it can be a little overwhelming. There are so many things that a newborn baby supposedly needs—a bassinet, a crib, diapers, a baby monitor, car seat... There were things I had never heard of and I still don't know what they do, but hey if my kid needs it add it to the cart! But when you bring the child home, you realize what he or she needs the most. When the infant cries he doesn't need that thing you bought twelve of on Amazon prime, he needs his mom or dad to pick him up and bounce him at 3:30 in the morning. What your kid needs is you. Who else will provide the child with what she needs in the middle of the night. Who else will make sure the child has proper clothes and nutritious food? Who else will pick the child up and take him in their arms and comfort him? Most importantly, who will bring that child to sit at Jesus' feet and learn of his unending love? You kids because that is how God has designed it.

Hear what Jesus has to say... ***“Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”***

You might picture Jesus saying it with a smile on his face, but in context I think it went down more like this: Children are coming to Jesus. Maybe some are being carried, some are toddling, some are running, in any case, they we're probably making some noise. But then Jesus' disciples were trying to put a stop to it. Maybe they didn't have time for that; maybe they weren't good with kids. Whatever their reason they were running interference, and Jesus was indignant (that's what Mark tells us). He rebukes them and said, ***“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”***

When I hear those words as they were originally meant to be heard, those words crush me for all the times I've hindered my own children from seeing Jesus. I can't picture any Christian parent running interference like the disciples did that day, but we do in ways we might not always realize. In harsh or impatient or hypercritical words, I have not shown them the tender love and mercy of Jesus. Or sometimes it's the opposite; I've hindered them by not correcting them and teaching them the right way because I was too busy or it wasn't battle I wanted to fight or I wanted to be the cool parent. Think of the confusing message it sends to a child when with the same tongue you praise God you also swear or gossip. Other times we might hinder our children from sitting at Jesus' feet in the way we set priorities. You can stand on your head and tell your child how important listening to Jesus's Word is and that Jesus comes first in your life, but what does your child learn when you get into the pattern of worshipping or hearing a devotion only when other activities aren't scheduled? ***“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them...”***

Those words really sting when we hear them as they are meant to be heard. But in those words of Jesus, hear also a sincere invitation for not only children to come to Jesus but for you to come and sit at Jesus feet and receive his blessing. Jesus said, ***“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”*** The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. If you don't have children, and up until this point you've felt like you've just been sitting on the sidelines, take a closer look at Jesus words. Maybe it brings you back to when you were a child and with the simple joy and faith of a child you used to sit at Jesus' feet. But years have passed, life has gotten busy and more complicated, and you've found yourself neglecting Jesus' and his words for different reasons. Jesus invites you also to come to him as a little child. The kingdom of God's gracious rule in a sinner heart belongs to the one who becomes like a little child. Think of a child who hears a necessary rebuke. They are brought to tears and then what do they often do? They run into the arms of the one who rebukes and there they find comfort. If Jesus' words of rebuke crush you as they crush me, what do you do? Don't go down the path of self-deprecation, beating yourself up. Instead run into the arms of the one who just rebuked you and there you find comfort. Jesus never turned away a little child who came to be blessed. And a child isn't ashamed to meltdown and admit that he needs to be picked up and carried. Jesus doesn't turn you away when you humble yourself like a little child, falling at his feet and bringing to him your failures and your sins. He forgives you. His kingdom belongs to you, a forgiven child of God.

Being a Christian parent doesn't mean you have to be perfect. If that's what you have in mind you are setting an unrealistic expectation for you and your child. Being a Christian parent means you not only bring your child to sit at Jesus' feet; first you yourself sit at Jesus' feet. Your child is watching and learning. You show your child how

much you need Jesus' love and forgiveness as you confess your sins but also trust that Jesus forgives those sins. You show your child where to find that love and forgiveness as you point them to Jesus for forgiveness when they sin. You bring your children to be blessed by Jesus and his word as they sit at the feet of Christian teachers and Sunday school teachers and pastors and you sit right there with them because you need the blessings that come from Jesus' Word. You let your children, big or little, come to Jesus when Jesus and his Word are not just a compartment of your life but the very foundation. You can do that by setting habits like reading a devotion at the dinner table and reflecting on one passage. In our weekly email for this week I suggested just a few resources to help you with that (See a list of suggested resources below). Just as importantly, you can bring Jesus and his word into everyday life in a less formal way. If you live in the valley chances are you spend a fair amount of time driving. When you're on the road, talk to your children and as they bring up challenges or questions consider what God's word might have to say. Or as your kids get older and they learn to read they are inevitably going to see bumper stickers or billboards that communicate a variety of beliefs or topics. That could start a valuable conversation about God's Word or about God's grace for all people or God's will for our lives.

If years have passed and your children are older, or if the Lord hasn't blessed you with children or whatever your situation may be, I'd like to thank you for the kindness you show to little children and their families. You support in different ways the ministry of our congregation so that children of all ages can sit at Jesus' feet. And one of the greatest things you do is you smile when you see and hear little children in church. One Sunday years ago, I apologized to a member sitting in front of us. We were juggling one or two kids and they were squirmy and not so quiet. That member said to me, "I love hearing kids in church. If we stop hearing that sound our church isn't growing." She grasped Jesus' command, "**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**" Finally those words of Jesus aren't just for Christian parents, they are for Christian congregations as we together sit at Jesus' feet as one big family. Amen.

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Here are some basic tools that might help you to sit at Jesus' feet either as a family or as an individual.

**WELS Daily Devotions** is one resource to find short devotions each day. You can read the devotion or you can listen to it. [Click here](#) to access daily devotions.

**WELS Family Devotions** are a great way for families with children of all ages to sit at Jesus' feet. Devotions are posted three times a week and include a Bible reading, a short devotional message, and discussion questions for various age groups. [Click here](#) to access family devotions.

**5-Minute Bible Studies for Families** is a devotional book that has a short Bible study for three days each week. It is intended for children in kindergarten through eighth grade. Families could alternate between this book and WELS Family Devotions. [Click here](#) to find this book at Northwestern Publishing house.

**5-Minute Bible Studies for Teens** is formatted similarly to the book mentioned above. [Click here](#) to find this book at Northwestern Publishing house.

These are just a few resources that you might find helpful to bring God's Word into your daily life and into your family's routine. More online devotional resources can be found at [wels.net/serving-you/devotions](http://wels.net/serving-you/devotions). More books available in print and electronically can be found at [NPH.net](http://NPH.net).