

Mark 9:30-37  
16 Sept 2012

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CCNS

## Children of God

Growing up as a child in this congregation is vastly different from the situation found in our gospel this morning.

“Commentators such as John Pilch tell us that in first-century Mediterranean culture children did not count for anything except as potential adults...” *Miller*

Children were basically invisible to adults – except perhaps to their mothers! Believe it or not, children were even less-valued than slaves. At least the slaves provided a service for their meals.

If we can get our minds around this, then we can see how radical a move it was for Jesus to bring a child to the forefront of everyone’s attention. “Whoever welcomes a child in my name welcomes not only me but the one who sent me.” This was Jesus’ exclamation point to his earlier words when he tells his squabbling disciples that whoever wants the glory – at least the sort of glory Jesus will have - must be willing to be last and servant of all.

This doesn’t sit well with the disciples. Obviously they are still trying to figure all this “following Jesus” stuff. Jesus cracks open their close-knit circle and doesn’t just point to someone’s son or daughter. No. He lifts up and embraces a child. He overturns the usual social order, expecting his followers, all of his followers, to adopt a pattern that even challenges our culture’s values.

The good news is, in our Congregational ethos, children are very much a part of our community. We are different (I hope) than other cultures. The tougher part of Jesus’ lesson today is that we put aside any desire for recognition or fame and quietly go about bringing in God’s kingdom. What is the cost to living this way? Maybe no one will hold a gala in your honor or etch your name into a trophy. Jesus’ point is that there is soul-deep satisfaction in touching another person’s life. Usually I find you are setting things in motion behind the scenes and, if not, you don’t want any credit for what I have been told is, “Just doing what needs to be done.”

This world Jesus talks about doesn’t have room for status symbols or ostentatious displays. Jesus is asking us to be like those of his culture who were basically invisible. That would be difficult for a lot of people in this country who like the attention and praise their good works might do. I don’t find that to be the case here.

To use an image from the Harry Potter series, I venture to say that most of us would do just fine with Harry’s Invisibility Cloak, dropping things for the shelter or food pantry, helping someone pay their rent or simply sending a note to cheer someone up.

There are times, though, when we have to take off that cloak of invisibility so that the people who need our encouragement can see, well, the face of God. By that I mean personally connecting with someone in the hospital, or stuck at home, or in a tough place emotionally or mentally. It means taking a huge risk of time and finances and, yes, our hearts, to travel to an orphanage in Haiti, a hill village in Mexico, or a desolate Indian reservation in South Dakota.

Next week we will commission and dedicate our Haiti team in worship. I invite all who have been involved – which means all of us – to be a part of this. They will need our prayers and concern. So when they leave for Haiti in just 13 days they will arrive at HELO as beacons of hope to those children and the adults who care for them. Our Haiti Honeys go not only for themselves but on our behalf. Not all of us are cut out for travel or mission trips but many of us are happy to help on this end, so that in Haiti there will be clothes and shoes and activities. We have to remember, though, the most important gift this all-woman team is bringing, the most important gift we all are capable of giving, is our heart.

Clothes and shoes and toys are fleeting. Caring human contact and relationships bring hope and encouragement that are lasting. That is why next August we will also have a team of youth and adults travel to the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota with Simply Smiles. It will be, what I hope, an enduring partnership for years to come.

A week here, a week there. You may ask, “How can a few people in one short week bring any permanent change?” Change may not come in measurable and visible ways like a building. Change happens on an organic level, in the lives of those whom we selflessly offer our care and concern. I have heard it said over and over, “Just knowing that you are praying for us and thinking about us, keeps us going. It gives us faith.”

We are all children of God and when we bring our authentic selves to whatever it is we are doing, WE become the change. And remember, in everything we do in person or under our invisibility cloaks, not only effects hope and change in someone’s life. Hope and change will happen to us, if we are willing to take the risk.

Amen.

*To Welcome Every Child*, By Ron Miller, Thursday, September 21, 2006