

“Welcome Grimy People” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church joint worship service with the Korean  
Congregation  
October 7, 2018, Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
Mark 10:13-16

Can't you just see Jesus sitting there surrounded by beautiful children, neatly dressed and spotlessly clean. Isn't that the picture most people have in mind when they read this scripture? Probably.

But is that a true picture of what happened that day when Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me.”? Probably not. In Jesus' day society valued status, your place in society. It was a society where children were the lowest of the low. From reading the Bible, most of us probably recognize that servants had little status in society, especially those servants who took care of the house. Well, children were considered lower on the social ladder than those household servants who served food to the master of the house.

In Jesus' day, you couldn't get much lower than that. Children had no status. I doubt if the average child in a worker's home got nice clothes and a regular bath. Those crowding around Jesus just may have been a bit on the grimy side and a bit smelly. I couldn't find any images to show you Jesus surrounded by dirty, poorly dressed children but try to imagine that scene.

The disciples probably were keeping the children away from Jesus, so Jesus could spend time with the ‘important people.’ The disciples wanted their teacher to meet and impress those people who were important in society at that time. They wanted Jesus' teachings and wisdom to impress others just as they had been impressed.

Haven't you seen this behavior before? When someone who is viewed as important – like a Senator, Mayor, Judge, the Presbytery Executive – don't people want to speak with that person? Don't they want to be seen with that person? Perhaps they feel important just having been in the company of the ‘important’ person.

But that day Jesus wanted nothing to do with those well-dressed, clean, ‘important people.’ He wanted to teach a lesson to his disciples and to us. Jesus' words were shocking to those that heard them. Jesus blessed those who were lowest on the social ladder in that society, those who were considered to be of no importance and certainly of no use to help one raise one's social status.

Isn't that just like Jesus? Jesus' teachings were so counter cultural. He taught that the poor needed to be taken care of, that wealth may just keep you from inheriting the kingdom of God. Jesus healed those rejected by society. His asking for the children to come to him should not have surprised his disciples. But it did. They were slow learners. How are you doing in welcoming those society would prefer not to acknowledge?

Perhaps you'd like to experiment with what author, Daniel Clendenin, explains.

"Whenever I am repulsed by a homeless bum who loiters near our home or nurse a grudge against a friend who spurned me or envy someone more successful than I am, I try to picture that person as a little baby or child.

"I then find it far easier to welcome or receive them only as a precious human being, rather than someone who can help or harm me, as someone I might ignore, fear or flatter." The simple act of welcoming another person in that way is to welcome Jesus. As Jesus says: **"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."** (Mark 9:37)

"Similarly, to become or imitate children, as Jesus commands, is to understand our own selves in the same manner, not as people whose significance rests in titles, honors, successes or failures, as if those might gain or deny us favor with God and man, but in the knowledge that we are human beings loved by God. That, says Jesus, is the only way to experience the presence of his kingdom." As Jesus says in today's scripture from Mark: **"Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."** (Daniel Clendenin, Journey with Jesus for September 24, 2006. [journeywithjesus.net](http://journeywithjesus.net). Retrieved March 30, 2015.)

Jesus does have a way of turning the world upside down, of challenging accepted social conventions. Won't you join him. After all, we do call ourselves Christ-followers.

May God bless your every effort.