

Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church
Rev. Bob Undercuffler

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“All are Welcome”

Psalm 19
Mark 9:30-37

**Now that was a memorable dust-up between Jesus and his closest friends
... with His disciples.**

They had just arrived in town
and had gone to the home of friends.

Now after greeting and shaking hands, and hospitable chit-chat ...

..... Jesus and his disciples are preparing for dinner

-- Washing their hands and soaking sore feet.

Then, abruptly Jesus asks an awkward question –

**“What were you arguing about back there
on the road?”**

Watch those close friends scurry for cover --

- Pretending they don't hear.
- Several try to cover their embarrassment by more vigorously brushing the dust from their clothing.
- Some talk louder to mask their anxiety.
- One begins to edge out of the room.

You see, Jesus' friends are distressed when challenged with that question because back there on the road they had been arguing –

WHO IS GREATEST?

WHO IS MOST IMPORTANT?

**WHO WILL HAVE THE POWER IN THE
KINGDOM JESUS KEEPS TALKING ABOUT?**

They are upset now ...

Embarrassed and ashamed

Because they remember what Jesus had said just the day before –

**Remember, he said ... “If you want to come with me,
you must forget yourself,
carry your cross and follow me.”**

**And now, 24 hours later, here they are arguing
who is the greatest?!**

So once again Jesus gathers his small band of followers and tries to explain to them yet one more time –

And in one sentence/ followed by a single object lesson Jesus answers the question –

WHO IS GREATEST?!

Jesus says, “If you want to be first, you will have to place yourself last of all – and be a servant to all.”

At that moment, a child scurries into the room -- a disciple reaches to put the child outside. But Jesus motions the child to his side – and puts his arms around the child ...

**“...Whoever welcomes one of these children welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me,
.... also welcomes God who sent me.”**

Can you feel that grab his disciples’ attention?

They have been arguing – “I’M MOST IMPORTANT.’

Jesus says, “If you want to be first, place yourself last of all.”

The disciples are lobbying, “I’M NUMBER ONE! DO IT MY WAY!

Jesus counters, if you want to come with me, forget yourself – carry your cross – and follow ...

The disciples are asking, “WHICH OF US IS GREATEST?”

And Jesus draws a child up close and says,
“If you welcome this child, you welcome me.”

BUT JUST ONE MOMENT, JESUS –

“We’re on important business here in Capernaum, and in a few days we will be on to Jerusalem.

It takes strong leaders to meet the challenges.

We will be on the doorstep of power!”

(If you want to be first, then be the last of all)

There will be a showdown with the people in power.

(If you want to come with me, forget yourself.

Carry your cross – and follow.)

**But in Jerusalem we’ll be face to face with Herod and Pilate –
 Jesus, now is the time to SEIZE POWER.**

(Look, welcome this child and you welcome me –
 Welcome me and you have everything!

“Lord, we don’t have time for children –

The hour is late...

Seize power now!

**Oh sure, children are fine, but the revolution
 is upon us.**

**JESUS, SON OF GOD, MARCH ON –
 WE ARE WITH YOU!**

“Women – men – WELCOME CHILDREN!

But Jesus, children just get in the way!

**On the journey they get sick at the most embarrassing times --
 They’re loud – always playing –
 And they don’t pay taxes!**

How can we support an army

**And build schools –
And improve the roads –
And have a church**

...when we're catering to kids all the time?!

FRIENDS – You who believe in me, “WELCOME CHILDREN ...
“WHEN YOU WELCOME A CHILD
YOU WELCOME ME –
AND WHEN YOU WELCOME ME –
YOU HAVE EVERYTHING!!!”

**LET'S PAUSE HERE FOR A MOMENT
AND PONDER ---**

“WELCOME CHILDREN.”

FIRST, WELCOME.

Notice, Jesus doesn't say ... “Tolerate Children.”

“Make the best of a bad age’

He does not say, “Do your duty.”

--Put up with them because, after all, they're your children.
Or your grandchildren.

Rather, Jesus says, **Welcome** Children.

Bring children to the inside of your plans and your decisions...

Let children share life with you –

Not preparation for life when they are grown-up, but LIFE – **NOW**.

**So listen to the children – Hear – Respond –
Act with children!**

Pick-out what is right with the children
(not their flaws)

Affirm their assets – Not their deficits.

Here at Head of Christiana we are thinking about children –

Not so much the children of the past – when oodles of children and youth flooded this place and fellowship ... and you were filled with joy and hope ...

but today, Rally Day 2015, it's best not to be stuck in the past –

trying to rekindle the past. To re-create the past.

Or grieving as those who have no hope.

but best – most healthy –is for us to imagine and plan for the children of today and tomorrow. The children.

The Youth. The Young Adults.

THEIR PARENTS. THEIR CAREGIVERS.

And that shouldn't be too difficult to accomplish -- with an attitude that runs like this that was spoken to me several years ago shortly after I arrived among you.

...A long-time member affirmed to me –

“Members of Head of Christiana have a heart for children – always has ... always will have.”

That touched my heart. That gave me hope for the future. A goal to work towards.

A vision to rally around. That wasn't outlandish but was an expression of hope.

Yes, we have a core of committed children and youth ... and leaders who work with them ...

And the call goes out ... Let the children come to me ... all the children ... a growing band of children.

And to meet-up with more children we join with girl scouts and their leaders. And we collect school supplies with children of Downes elementary school and mentor some of their children.

And two Saturdays ago we enjoyed a Family Fun Fest, complete with a Fire Truck,

And memorable older cars,

And firemen and proud owners of historic cars talked with one another ... AND WITH THE CHILDREN.

And then there was that exceptional program with Jack Foreaker from Cecil County with a lovely entertaining program of puppets and magic and songs and merriment.

And I was told that there were in all 19 children who came and enjoyed those hours.

(and all the adults enjoyed those hours too.)

All our children!

“WELCOME CHILDREN.”

We have enriched our understanding of **WELCOME**.

Now, let's focus on **CHILDREN**.

It's fairly easy to welcome our own children – our own grandchildren.

Oh, I know all about the “terrible twos” and trying teenagers – but after all, they are our kids and so we stick by them and care and support and encourage them – WE LOVE THEM. **They are our children.**

And children within our church -- and children who live next door and across the street – We have watched them play, and we enjoy their plays and musicals and sports. We buy their cookies and wrapping paper. We know their names. In many cases we know their moms and dads.

Certainly we welcome them.

But Jesus invites us to **expand** our world of CHILDREN –

--TO EXPLORE WAYS TO WELCOME THE CHILDREN OF THE COMMUNITY – THE WORLD'S CHILDREN!

CHILDREN WHO ARE REFERRED TO SIMPLY,
AS *THOSE CHILDREN*.

Children who have no one to speak for them.

No one to consistently care for them.

Children who suffer abuse and neglect –

WELCOME CHILDREN –

The children we know – **And those we don't know.**

THE CHILDREN WE CALL BY NAME ...

AND THE CHILDREN ASSIGNED LABELS ...

CHILDREN CLASSIFIED AS -- SLOW – ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDERED – DELINQUENT – CRAZY – BEHAVIOURILLY AND EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED – Oh here’s one – ILLEGITIMATE

(Mercy, what has any child done to deserve that label?)

And children wandering the deserts of Syria and Iraq. With no place to lay their heads. With no place to call home. Refugees, we call them. That is, they are dependent on others (Like us?) for refuge.

And Jesus says – “These children – yes, **especially** these challenging, suffering, lost children – WELCOME – LOVE - CARE FOR ALL THESE CHILDREN.

But then further and deeper – the children standing there before Jesus represents most all people – EVEN WE ADULTS.

- These children represents those with no power - utterly dependent on others.
- These children standing there before Jesus represents the people being crushed by poverty and injustice of many kinds ...
- This child looking to Jesus represents throngs of people crossing borders, willing to bear the stigma “Illegal” in order to find stability, and safety, a job, some hope.
- These children we are urged to welcome – represent women who are without voice – who are acted against and spoken against – or simply ignored by the articulate and powerful.
- These children even represents you and me in those terrifying moments when we lack power and feel life and meaning and effectiveness slipping from our grasp.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- These children, there in Jesus’ arms, represent you and me as we sit with the doctor and she says, “We can slow the tumor **but we cannot stop it.**” Six months...a year. I’m sorry”
(We know what it is to be a child!)

- These children represent you and me as we rush into the hospital and the nurse takes us aside and says, “I’m sorry, we did all we could do.” (We know what it is to be a child!)

And then we are shaken awake – or simply touched. WE RECOGNIZE TO WHOM WE BELONG -- We know we are held safe in the arms of Jesus. Welcomed into his embrace.

AND JESUS SAYS, “WELCOME CHILDREN.” ALL ARE WELCOME!

Open our arms – our lives to one another – for in the deepest sense most all of us are children.

Folks in need of care and compassion.

Women and men unable to make it through life on our own.

Yearning desperately for sisters and brothers who will stop – and care – listen and hear. And share life with us.

WELCOME! ALL ARE WELCOME!

And Jesus says. “When you welcome children –
When you welcome others –
YOU WELCOME ME!”

**AND WHEN YOU WELCOME ME – YOU
HAVE EVERYTHING! YOU HAVE EVERYONE!**

WHO COULD ASK FOR ANYTHING MORE?