

Sermon Notes: September 19, 2021

Focus: Welcoming children and everyone else

[Lectionary Readings](#)

I am surprised that I never noticed Jesus repeating himself about welcoming children.

Mark 9

Jesus asked, “What were you arguing about on the road?” But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, **“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”**

Mark 10

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”** And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

This is a Jesus “did I stutter?” moment. Disciples were arguing about who is more awesome, so Jesus pulls the kids to himself to make his point. Then the disciples are hating on children, so Jesus grabs more kids and shows that it is the youth who are the most open to the Kingdom of God. Kids have an important window into reality because they have not become desensitized to the world as they directly experience it.

There is a fun podcast called Freakanomics and one episode is called “think like a child.” Here are some excerpts of the transcript that I think illustrate how we can think like a child in the way Jesus might appreciate.

On today’s program, we begin with a magic show ... The magician’s name is Alex Stone.
STONE: Ok. I’m gonna start with something really simple maybe some of you have seen it, maybe you haven’t, and then we’ll go from there and maybe get a little more sophisticated and more complicated.

And the audience is kids – a bunch of middle-schoolers from I.S. 318 in Brooklyn.
STONE: I’m just gonna take a handkerchief here....do you want to check it out? Make sure it’s normal, nothing weird? I only blew my nose in it like just once. It’s okay.

With the thumb of his right hand, Stone stuffs the handkerchief into his left hand and then – yeah, you’ve seen this before – it disappears. But then he reaches behind one kid’s ear and pulls out the handkerchief.

Stephen J. DUBNER: Did you feel that come out of your ear?

KID: Um, no.

DUBNER: Where did it come from?

KID: I don’t know.

Now they try to figure out the trick.

DUBNER: Does anybody have any guesses?

KID: He probably has like on his hand he has like a pocket? And he pulls it out?

STONE: Getting warmer now. That's good thinking.

They get warmer, and then they get hot:

KID: Something that involves your thumb?

STONE: What's your name?

KID: Jennifer?

STONE: Jennifer, everyone give Jennifer a round of applause.

STONE: So, check this out.

Stone reaches into his right front pants pocket and pulls out ... a fake thumb.

KIDS: Oh!

STONE: Yeah it's a fake thumb. it's called a thumb tip, it's one of the most valuable tools in magic, there are thousands of tricks you can do with it. And it's pretty darn obvious once you know it's there.

STONE: But, and magicians have even, just to prove how no one notices, sometimes they'll do it with a red one or metal one. No one notices, they are not looking for a fake thumb. Right, and that's how it works. And then it's gone and then you bring it back just like that. Now, we had also invited some adults to see this magic show. How well did they figure out the trick?

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ADULT: Palming it?

STONE: That's the dumbest theory I ever heard, so stupid, go home.

So we asked the kids why they seemed to do better than the adults.

KID: I think kids could think out of the box.

KID: Maybe adults are more serious than kids.

KID: When you went to the adults, they didn't have any clue.

KID: 'Cause they are focusing on handkerchief instead of the thumb.

None of this was surprising to Alex Stone. He's seen it all before, and he says that other magicians have too. If you're a magician and your life depends on fooling an audience of adults versus an audience of kids, you'd choose the adults every time.

STONE: There's a sense that when a kid watches a trick ... they're asking a question at every second. They're really approaching it with this sort of constant sense of curiosity and constant sense of trying to understand what's going on. And I feel like their brains are just always awake when they're watching it.

All right, then. If kids tend to be more curious and more alert when it comes to magic, what about the rest of life? What about coming up with good ideas and even solving problems. Is it possible we'd all be better off if we could think like a child?

My sermon today is simple: Think like a child, value the youth, and look beyond the tip of your thumb for inspiration. We at church always want kids to come to church and will lament when families are not as involved as "we" think they should. But we would do well instead to embrace children as critical for our own growth as followers of God.

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