

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

Introduction:

Today is a special day! And we are here, doing one of the things that the church has done for over two thousand years. That is, we bring and dedicate our children to the Lord. And we are the church. And we do this publicly! A few moments ago, we pledged our support to Lisa and Adam and Gabri and Brian in their desire and commitment to raise Nico, Ezra, Michael and Titus, and Elias in the ways of the Lord.

We will pray for them. We will offer spiritual and moral support to them as they seek to raise their children in the knowledge of God and in his love to us as God demonstrated it in Jesus. We are not alone in this. God, our Emanuel is here, present with us and in us in this moment. God will be with us always!

This moment, this sacred moment is now part of our history as one more sacred moment in which the

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

people of God, the church, continues to dedicate the children to the Lord.

And in following Jesus’ footsteps and example, the church welcomes the children **for theirs is the Kingdom of God**. And I am sure that Jesus enjoys these moments, when his children, his church follow his example of love and regard for children.

People bringing even infants to Jesus:

The passage that we read says that people were bringing even their infants to the Lord. I don’t know why the people were doing this. I am glad that they thought that Jesus would welcome their children, even their infants.

Luke says that they wanted Jesus to touch them. The people bringing their children to Jesus believed that Jesus touch was divine. They had seen or heard of Jesus touching the eyes of the blind and the blind receiving their sight. Jesus touched the lepers and the lepers were cleaned. Jesus touch the dead and the dead was raised up from the dead. The disciples

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

didn't think it was a good idea for Jesus to “waste” his time with the children. To them, Jesus had better things to do than to make time for children. And I am glad Jesus stopped his disciples.

Jesus’ response

Jesus response to his disciples was, “Let the little children come to me and do not stop them. Do not stop them! I want to see them! stop trying to stop them from coming to me. I have time for them. I want to spend time with them. I want to pray for them. In fact, you, my disciples have something to learn from children.

For it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belong.

Perhaps we can stop a little here and think about this. What was Jesus talking about? What is so special about children? Really? If the Kingdom of God belongs to children, how is the Kingdom of God even sustainable? In the world we have grown up, it is the smart, the clever, the self-reliant, the “successful person” according to the ways of the

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

world that seems to get ahead all the time. Even as we claim to trust in the Lord, when push comes to shove, we tend to rely more in ourselves than in God.

But the children, especially infants, are totally dependable on their parents. I have mentioned in the past about that day when Debbie came home with Gracie. Gracie was a little girl whose parents, for several reasons, could and would not take care of her.

And so, we took her in for a period of transition. Gracie is Debbie’s second cousin. Debbie came home with her with just a garbage bag with some changes of cloth in it for her. And I remember thinking, “this poor child has no idea how poor she is”. We took care of her for just a few months and then she moved on with somebody else who took her in for the long haul. She is well taken care of now and she is doing fine.

Gracie had no choice but to trust in those who took her in. She had to trust that these adults were

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

going to care for her. She was completely vulnerable and in those situations, sometimes, some adults abuse children like Gracie. But she had no choice. Children have no choice. They must trust in adults that I take care of them. I am so glad that when God called us to trust in him, he demonstrated time and time again that he is trustworthy.

And God expects us, especially the church to be trustworthy and be responsible and to lovingly and tenderly care for the children he has entrusted to us. In fact, God’s desire is that all people, everybody, take good care of the children that have been entrusted to our care.

Unfortunately, more often than we would like to think, children are still being neglected. There are still too many people who are still not bringing their children to God and still not raising them in the knowledge of the love of God.

And sometimes, just sometimes, churches may still be preventing people to bring their children to the Lord. I am so glad that Smoky Row not only

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

welcomes children, but it is also concerned with their spiritual growth. I love the active role that you, church, have taken in developing ways that help to introduce our children to the knowledge of God. I can mention some, Children’s church, VBS, those activity bags, that little toilet!

I don’t have little children any more. They have grown, but I think our children would have loved those activity bags. So, as we continue to welcome our children with these things, we can continually examine and evaluate what we are doing so that we are continually proactive in the life of our children and in our desire to guide them to the knowledge of God.

And of course, continued prayers for the families who are raising children right now. James calls us not only to confess our sins to one another, but also pray for one another, for prayer is powerful and effective (James 5:16). So, prayer is one of the big things that we can do for one another. Yes, prayer doesn’t cost us much and, yet it is so effective.

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

It is so effective because in prayer, we ask God to act on our behalf. Prayer shows that we trust in God. That we rely on God. In some ways, praying is to be like children. Children do not know how their parents can take care of their needs, but they trust that when they ask, the parents will respond to their needs and/or wants. I have seen parents, who are very poor, and yet, they try to respond to their children needs the best that they can.

Yes, there are occasions when God wants us to do something else in addition to prayer. Sometimes God wants to use us to respond to someone’s prayer. We may be called to support parents who are in extreme poverty and who must care for their children.

Of course, other ways in which children may be denied meeting Jesus is when they are abused and/or neglected by the adults, usually their parents, called to care for them.

And it is children in abusive or neglect situations we may be called to take in and protect. I believe

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

that when we abuse or neglect a child, we are in some ways, neglecting God’s word and being disobedient to Jesus’s example. Jesus told his disciples, “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Jesus said this to his disciples in the context of that time when he washed his disciples’ feet. But Jesus’ entire life is an example for us to follow. Treating our children well is a way to “wash their feet” just like Jesus has washed our feet. It is also a way to serve well one another.

It would be rather hypocritical if we wash each other’s feet and then bite each other up. Jesus is our example to follow and the way he expects us to treat our children. Some adults who were abused as children have a hard time trusting in God. So, abuse and neglect are a way to keep our children from knowing Jesus well from their early childhood.

Thanks be to God that God can still act in ways that the abused and victimized can get to know God, their road to knowing God may be a hard road to walk. In fact, we are simply denying God’s desire

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

for them and God suffers with them in their abuse and neglect. In Mark 10:14 we read that Jesus was “indignant” when he saw what his disciples were doing. I can only imagine how indignant he might be when children are abused and neglected.

Teaching moment:

For the disciples, that moment was a teaching moment. They learned that Jesus welcomes children. They learned that he loves them and that they, the disciples, were rebuked for trying to stop the children from coming near him. So, they would probably not do that again.

They may have been acting according to their cultural practices, that is, children are not to “bother” adults and not interrupt important people. Children had a very low social status, and as far as the disciples were concerned, Jesus had more important things to attend to. I can only imagine how surprised they were when Jesus said to them, “Let the little children come to me and do not stop them (some

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

translations say, “do not forbid them) for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs”.

We can't accept the ways the world treats children as the normal. I think that we, as a society, are walking a dangerous road down a path we should refuse to follow. We need to help our children to avoid exposure, on TV, internet and/or cell phone, to things which they are not physically, emotionally and spiritually ready for. Always be on the alert that they are not abused and/or exploited on line. I believe that if they experience these things it can make it harder for them to know and love God in their adult life.

For us: like the disciples, we need to always remember that Jesus loves children. That children have an important place in our communities. I believe that this church does well in loving our children. The children are important part of our SRBC community and praises to God for this. Children are a gift to humanity. They bring joy to the parents and rejuvenate the grands! Like me!

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

So, whether they come to us biologically or through adoption, they are a gift to us. We can't forget that all of us are created in the image of God when God knit us together, as the Psalmist says, “in our mother's womb” From that moment, a child is a gift from God and God expects us to treat that child with all dignity and respect that they deserve. The parents along with relatives and the church, being the community of God's people are responsible to ensure that we lead the child to the knowledge of the love of God in Christ.

By and large, our communities at large are still upset when we hear about abuse and exploitation of children and this morning we praise God for the families, our families, here at SRBC who are honoring God by taking good care of the children that he has given to us.

We need to be in prayer though for all the children who are not treated with love, dignity and respect. Pray for children who are being victimized even today. Recently we read in the news that “Two sisters, one 5 years old and the other 3 months old,

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

were rescued in Denver by undercover agents during this year's FBI-led sting operation against sex traffickers, ...The alleged trafficker, a friend of the children's family, made a deal to sell them for sex for \$600, the FBI said. The friend communicated with an undercover agent, the FBI said in announcing details of Operation Cross Country XI” (CNN New:

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/19/us/sex-trafficking-operation-arrests/index.html>; accessed 10/21/2017).

The criminals committing these crimes against children deserve the punishment, according to the law, for these crimes. These kinds of crimes are sins against God and against our children and remind us how broken we are and how much more we need to do in spreading the Gospel, the goods news of Jesus Christ that in Christ, humanity can be saved, redeemed and rescued from the power of sin.

Literary context

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

Trusting in self-righteous – Luke sandwiched these passage between a parable about a man praying a self-righteous prayer, which displeased God and a repentant man, who completely trusted in God’s mercy for the forgiveness of his sins. This what the passage says,

“9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

(Luke 18:9-14 NRSV).

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

God responds in forgiveness when we recognize that it is only by completely trusting in him, we can be forgiving. Confessing to God our sins and our inability to get it right, but completely trusting in him, and trusting in his mercy is what the Lord seeks. If we are self-righteous, like the first man was, then we are really saying to God, Oh, I am so good! Just basically saying to God, I am so good, you deserve me, instead of saying to God I don't deserve you, but I need your mercy. I don't deserve you, but have mercy of me anyways! And this trusting heart will be justified. Children trust in the adults, and they will trust in God from their early age when and if we introduce them to a merciful and loving God.

And that is the God of the Kingdom in which we have been invited to enter in Jesus. The prideful doesn't understand this and cannot accept and practice Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God. The one who trusts in God, will also trust in the teachings, life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus as the only way to the Father. So, trust in the faithfulness of God in Christ is needed to enter the

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

Kingdom of God. Only when we become like children can we accept this.

Holding on to material things over Jesus’ call

The second passage is found in Luke 18:18-30

And it says, “18 A certain ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 19 Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 20 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.’” 21 He replied, “I have kept all these since my youth.” 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money[c] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 23 But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

26 Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” 27 He replied, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.”

28 Then Peter said, “Look, we have left our homes and followed you.” 29 And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”

When we trust in the Lord and respond to his call and leave the things that keep us from fully trusting him as a child trusts, then we also change on what we consider necessary for living and realize that in God we have everything, and we learn to trust in him and not in our wealth.

A child born in poverty doesn’t know it. The child must trust even if the child does not know how to trust, the child is at the mercy of the parents anyways. I don’t believe that this passage is about wealth, but it is about who do we trust? God or our wealth. An infant child has no concept of wealth or

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

poverty. We learn these concepts as we grow up and look around and begin to compare ourselves with others. And if we are wealthy, we learn to love and trust in wealth. God wants us to trust in him and not in wealth.

Conclusion

The tax collector was justified because he only asked for mercy. He didn't make any claims that self-justified him, but he was dependent on God for justification and forgiveness. The self-righteous man simply prayed a self-righteous prayer that left no room for God. According to him, he didn't need God. And his “I thank you” sounds shallow to me.

The wealthy man could not give up his trust in his wealth and completely trust and follow Jesus like his other disciples had done.

The children couldn't even control their access to Jesus. Jesus had to intervene in their behalf by rebuking his disciples and telling them “Let the little children come”

“Following in Jesus’ steps”

Luke 18:15-17

May we continue to follow Jesus and become like him in the way he cares for trusting and vulnerable children. May we trust completely in him and not rely on ourselves or our wealth but rely completely in him. Jesus completely trusted in his Heavenly Father, so we too must follow in his footsteps and completely trust in our Heavenly Father. As we completely trust in God, in his love and mercy let us lead dedicate our children to Jesus. Jesus will always welcome and have a special place for them!