

Worship Service for October 3rd: 19th Sunday after Pentecost - World
Communion Sunday

- **Old Testament:** Deuteronomy 6:4-7
- **New Testament:** Mark 10:13-16
- **Psalms:** Psalm 8

Announcements:

- There is a children's Halloween parade at the fire hall in River John at 12.30 today. Everyone is welcome to come and watch.

Sermon Title: Let The Little Children Come to me and Do Not Hinder Them!

Our gospel reading tells us that people were bringing their little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. Firstly, this was part of the Jewish tradition in the days of Jesus. People would bring their children to the rabbi that he might lay his hands on them and bless them. And these people had been following Jesus' ministry to date and were quite impressed by him. They saw his love, power and humility and heard his powerful teachings. They wanted their children to know God and be part of God's kingdom. They wanted their children to have eternal life and salvation.

Above all, it was their greatest desire for Jesus to touch their children. This man – Son of Man and Son of God, who had such a powerful healing touch, he who had such a gentle touch of compassion, love and acceptance. They desired their children to partake of the greatness and gentleness of Jesus' touch of love and salvation and came with such joy and anticipation.

However, the disciples hindered the people from bringing their children to Jesus! We are not told why. Was it because they felt Jesus was too tired and needed some rest? Or was it because children were so insignificant in that they and age as we learned a couple of Sundays ago that they didn't feel the need to allow these children to see Jesus? Well, whatever their excuse was, Jesus wasn't having it because as soon as he noticed what was going on, he stopped them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

How do we too hinder our "children" from coming to Jesus?

A woman once told a story of her mother-in-law who had died of a very painful stomach cancer. And the daughter in law said to people that this wasn't a negative

thing at all. It was the most positive experience in both of their lives. And went on to narrate the following story.

“My mother-in-law was one of the most bitter, spiteful, difficult women I have ever met. I knew from the first minute she laid eyes on me that she was determined to be my enemy. In fact, my husband and I eloped so we wouldn’t have to deal with her at our wedding ceremony.

During the fifteen years that I knew her before her diagnosis with cancer, I never heard a kind word from her lips — except to our daughter. She had a soft spot in her heart for our daughter, but not for anyone else. She wasn’t mean only to me, but to my husband, to her other two sons, and to everyone she encountered. Repairmen told me that they dreaded a call from her home, and even the kindest clergyman we know had a difficult time with her rebukes and sarcasm.

I didn’t realize how much inner pain she had, until after her diagnosis. Before then, I just figured she was a hateful, mean woman. I didn’t take the time or make the effort to see beyond her façade. She had a stone wall around her heart. And she kept this stone wall in place for several weeks after her doctor told her she had cancer. Initially, she was given only a few weeks to live. It was amazing to everyone who knew her and knew her condition that she lived nearly five months by God’s grace.

She refused all offers of help except those from my husband and me. We were the only ones she would allow to enter her home to fix meals for her and to change her bed and do her laundry.

When the pain was intense, she’d ask us to read to her or to stay and converse with her to help take her mind off the pain. As the days went by and she saw that I was caring for her with love and concern — not with criticism or hate — she began to tell me her story. I began to understand why she was filled with such anger.

In her teen years a woman in her church accused her of stealing funds that the youth group had collected for a ski trip. The accusations were made in a very hurtful and public way, and my mother-in-law was given little chance to defend herself or to reply to the charges. She hadn’t taken the money, but the woman refused to believe her story and not only called her a thief but a liar.

My mother-in-law became so angry that she dropped out of church and turned her back on God. For years she had told me she was an atheist. After her diagnosis she modified that to say she didn't believe in God because if there was a God, He should be just and righteous, and there had been no justice on her behalf in this unfortunate situation.

She had been angry and bitter for forty-nine years. The more she suffered with her disease, the more she concluded that there was no God of mercy or kindness. She couldn't explain away, however, the peace that my husband, daughter, and I felt in our hearts — or the kindness and love that we showered upon her. Bit by bit, she began to soften. She even started asking us to read some of the Psalms to her when she was in pain. We had a couple of conversations about Heaven too.

One day when I went over to fix dinner for her, our daughter went along. She said, 'Granny Lou, I love you. And Jesus told me to tell you that He loves you too.' I froze in my tracks. I steeled myself for what I felt sure would be my mother-in-law's reply, probably something like, 'That's nice for you to believe.' Instead, she said, 'I know He does, dear. He told me so Himself last night.'

She looked up and I'm sure she read my face, which no doubt expressed great surprise and pleasure. She said, 'I saw Jesus last night. He came to the foot of my bed in a pool of bright light and said, 'Lou, I'm here to tell you that I love you. I want you to come live with Me.'" 'I know you probably think it's strange He would come calling on me like that, and I was pretty surprised myself. I asked Him, "How could You love an old hag like me?" He said, "You won't be an old hag when you are living with Me." And then He was gone.'

Not long after that, she asked my husband to pray the sinner's prayer with her. And about a week later, she died. Just before she died, she said, 'I wasted a lot of years railing against God. Instead of my doing all the talking against Him, I should have done a little more listening to Him.

My mother-in-law isn't the only one with a testimony," she said. "The Lord did a great thing in my own heart through this. I discovered in caring for my mother-in-law that I had failed to love as Christ loved. I repented of the hatred I had held toward my mother-in-law and asked God to forgive me and to help me love her as

He loved her. He softened my heart and gave me compassion and tenderness toward her that I would never have believed were possible. I find myself looking at difficult people with new eyes. I believe the Lord still has things to teach me and ways to use me.”

“One thing I know with certainty is that God can cross any barriers we might put up. I’m grateful that He still had something to say to my mother-in-law. I have a new faith that He still has something to say to me too.”

The church is supposed to mould people of love, compassion and kindness, yet how many people have we transformed into bitter people? How many times have we accused people falsely? How many times have we intentionally lied about people?

Why do we like the disciples keep hindering God’s children from coming to Jesus? If God were to stand before us will we repeat some of the things we say about others? What happened to loving God with all our hearts and souls and minds and loving our neighbours as ourselves? It doesn’t cost you anything to go and talk to someone if in doubt instead of believing and spreading lies because someone you know told you. Would you want others to believe things about you in that same way? Hopefully, if the pandemic has taught us one thing it is that the fact that many people are saying something doesn’t make it true. It doesn’t matter how many people are spreading that false information and the relationship you have with them, it will never make it true.

God’s word is coming to us today including me. I am first a child of God before I am a minister. So, before I stand before you and preach, I preach to myself. Like the apostle Paul, I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should, because I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27). Am I perfect? No. But I will never stop working on myself till I get the transformation that Jesus died for me to have. The people of Israel pushed Moses to anger to the point that he sinned against God and didn’t enter the promised land. I keep this story of Moses very close to my heart so that I would not end up the same way.

If you are listening or reading this message right now and in your mind you are saying “oh I hope this person came to church today or at least I hope they get to read this message.” Stop! This message is for you. The Bible says you should first

remove the log in your eye before taking out the splint in another person's eye (Matthew 7:5). If you want the world to change, start by changing yourself. We have hindered each other for way too long and our churches keep getting empty.

The reason why people do not come to Jesus is because they watch us and see that after praising and worshipping God together, as soon as we get out of the door, we begin to backstab each other. We stand right outside the church, in front of God and start killing each other. People don't see any difference between the world and us. The bible says if you say you love the Lord God, whom you do not see and you hate the neighbour you see, then you do not love God. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

God is watching each of us and will judge us accordingly. God judges the actions of people and our response to their actions against us. We are no different from Jesus' disciples. They too made their share of mistakes, so we don't need to beat ourselves up. Nevertheless, the difference between Peter and Judas Iscariot was genuine repentance. We need to acknowledge our mistakes and repent of them.

Don't conclude on anybody no matter how many mistakes they have made and are still making right now. Pray for them sincerely and God will work in their lives. Where there is genuine repentance, there is forgiveness. If we pray more for people than we talk about them, it will lead to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those people and it will end in genuine repentance.

For you who identifies with the pain of the mother-in-law in this story, God is speaking to you too. Yes, it is ok to be angry and disappointed that someone didn't treat me right. However, the Bible tells us not to let our anger to cause us to sin. Let go and forgive for your own good. You can pray and ask God to help you through the Holy Spirit. Don't stay in the place of anger and disappointment. Remember that we are all on a journey and that person that hurt you today might repent tomorrow. Hopefully, you have someone that you can ask to pray with you so that you can get that pain out of your heart. Be gentle with yourself and take time to have your retreat with God so that He can do His good work of healing in your heart.

And for you who has judged someone without giving them a chance to defend themselves, you need to repent and go to that person and here their own side of the story. Proverbs 18:17 says “the first to speak in court sounds right until someone comes forward and cross-examines him. Stop judging people through a biased mind and give a chance to everyone.

It is time for us to wake up and show our children the good example. It is time for us to be the light in a dark world. It is time for us to love each other – that if someone does something wrong you can come to that person and talk it out with them, and you both make peace and move on. It is time for us to love God and love each other in such a way that the people in our community will take note and desire to be a part of us. It is time for us to let our children come to Jesus and stop hindering them. We will not win when we fight against each other. We will only win when we come together in love because love conquers all. As we partake of the communion may it empower and give us grace us to bring others to Christ. Amen.

Prayer

Spirit of love and mercy, You who holds us close as all loving parents watch their children, we come to you this morning with the concerns of the past week still dancing in our minds. It has been a time of challenges, of misunderstandings and disappointments, as well as moments of personal joy and achievement. For each day presents a new opportunity to find the right path, and to direct our thoughts and feelings back towards your eternal love. In the midst of setbacks and obstacles in our day, we can find through your constant presence a reassurance that your light will continue to shine through the darkness of our world.

For we find ourselves in a world of conflict and confusion, a time of uncertainty. Events and those around us challenge the values that we have held close. Those connected to power and control as dominant values in their lives cannot comprehend our love for all persons in Your Sacred Name. We struggle to teach our children and grandchildren to share and be kind to their friends and send them out into a world that takes advantage of vulnerability, and mocks those who are sensitive to the needs of others. In our work, and our times of enjoyment with our friends, we live hour to hour by Your grace and peace, sharing the love of your Son in his ministry with us. And so, it is through our faith in Your abiding love that we are able to be faithful witnesses of the miracles that are possible in You.

Help us we pray to be better stewards of all that you have provided us. Give us the courage to live a life of faith in a time of conflict and despair. Help us to love one another, those who are our neighbors, those who live far away, that in these relationships we might learn and grow. Especially help us to listen to the words of Your Son, Jesus, who in his life with us has shown us how to live. For he taught us to love little children, and to see the kingdom of God in their eyes. We ask that you be with us, that you help and sustain us, and give us strength to live another day in testimony to you. For we ask this in the Name of Your Son Jesus Christ who taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

May God the Father who gives life to the world grant you grace to be faithful in the service of his Kingdom. May God the Son who walked the way of obedience, suffering and death grant you grace to live his life and proclaim his glory. May God the Holy Spirit who strengthens the people of God grant you grace to hold lightly and give generously of all that has been entrusted to you in this world. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.