

**Virtual Service for the
Linton Team of Churches
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity
5th July 2020
'Like children...'**



Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and our Lord Jesus Christ
be with us all. **Amen**

Hymn

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not
want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone.
And I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

2 He guides my ways in
righteousness,
and he anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.

Refrain

3 And though I walk the darkest
path,
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod
and staff
are the comfort I need to know.

Refrain

Stuart Townend, based on Psalm 23

© 1996 Thankyou Music/Adm. by
worshiptogether.com songs excl. UK & Europe,
adm. by kingswaysongs.com.

Prayer of Preparation

Let us pray:
**Lord, direct our thoughts,
teach us to pray,
lift our hearts to worship you
in Spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ. Amen**

A time of silence as we call to mind our sins and weaknesses, before we confess them to God.

Confession

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.'
So let us turn away from sin and turn to the Lord,
confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

cf Matthew 4.17

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.**

May almighty God have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins
and bring us to everlasting life
Amen

Collect

Gracious Father,
by the obedience of Jesus
you brought salvation to our wayward world:
draw us into harmony with your will,
that we may find all things restored in him,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Reading

Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30

Jesus said, 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a

glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

Reflection

We all know the important distinction between being childish and being childlike. If we tell someone they’re being childish, we’re reproving them - ‘Grow up!’ we’re saying, ‘Act your age!’ But as Christians we know that our Lord called us to be like children – *childlike*: ‘*Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*’, he says in Mark 10.15 (NIV translation). No doubt those words surprised his first hearers, and they can still be a challenge to us, even though we’re familiar with them.

Today’s Gospel passage contained two clear references to children: I’ll go through them, one by one, and let’s see what food for thought they leave us with. First of all, we heard Jesus saying that the people of his generation were like children in the market place – petulant children, who can’t make up their minds what they want: “*We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn*” (v.17) they whine and complain. Have you ever listened to children talking like that? ‘*I don’t want to play her silly game, I want her to play my game! Yes, I know I liked that game yesterday, but it’s not the kind of game I want to play today!*’ (Perhaps a bit of foot-stamping and face-pulling comes in here...)

Yes - this is childish behaviour. Who was Jesus accusing of being childish? Was it everyone in 'his generation', or just certain people? I suppose that potentially it was everyone, because we all have the capacity to be childish and petulant when we don't get our own way; but I think that he particularly had in mind his critics, those of the Pharisees and the Scribes who never liked anything he did, and who hadn't much liked John the Baptist, either. The Pharisees were very much looking forward to the coming of God's kingdom as they understood it; their whole scheme for obeying the Jewish law, and getting other people to do so too, was geared towards hastening its coming. But when Jesus came announcing that the kingdom was already near – in fact, embodied in him – and that the signs that this was true were all those healings he was doing, including healings on the Sabbath day, many of the didn't like that one little bit. He wasn't 'playing the game' according to their rules – he was *changing* the game, so they weren't in charge of the rules any more, and ordinary people were cheering him on - hence the petulance, hence the complaints.

It's easy for us, with hindsight to be 'down' on those Pharisees and Scribes – but aren't we ever a bit like that? Take the person who says, 'Church leaders shouldn't be so namby pamby – they should speak out more!' And then what happens? An Archbishop or Pope, or even just an ordinary parish priest or curate, *does* speak out about some burning issue of the day from a Christian point of view, and the person doesn't agree with what's said, and gets even more irate about church leadership...The sad thing is that this is when some people take to social media to launch vindictive attacks, whilst others just leave the church.

Do you recognise the behaviour? Has that complaining, critical person, *in ever so slight a way*, been you?

Childish petulance – I think we may all be prey to it when we don't get our way or hear our own opinion echoed and validated, whether it's in issues like this or more personal matters. Sometimes we may recognise it for what it is and even try to suppress it, but it still affects our behaviour and manner. It takes the grace of God to convert it into something more loving, open and constructive. So, let's all pray to have that grace when we need it!

Now we come to the other reference to children in our passage – to the ‘infants’ (v.25) to whom the Father reveals his secrets. These are the ‘childlike’, who enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10.15), the ‘babes and infants’ of Psalm 8.2 who are, in some mysterious way, a bulwark against God’s foes. What does it take to become childlike in this way – to live clearly and bravely for God, to act for him in the world, but without the rigidity of children who only want to play by the rules they understand, or have chosen?

What it takes is to live close to Jesus, to walk in step with him as one animal does with another when they’re yoked together. There’s a psalm I love which I think helps here: it talks about surrendering to God and finding rest, without the need to understand everything, without the need to have a view about everything. I quote it, to end, in the version in which I first learnt it:

*‘O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a child that is quieted at its mother’s breast;
like a child that is quieted is my soul.’* (Psalm 131.vv1,2, in the RSV).

Prayers of intercession

Please pray in the way that comes most naturally to you, either in silence or out loud we end with the Lord’s Prayer

Our Father...

Thanksgiving

Living God, Father of light,
Hope of nations, Friend of sinners,
Builder of the city that is to come;
your love is made visible in Jesus Christ,
you bring home the lost, restore the sinner
and give dignity to the despised.

We give you thanks

We praise your holy name

In the face of Jesus Christ
your light shines out,
flooding lives with goodness and truth,
gathering into one a divided and broken humanity.

We give you thanks

We praise your holy name

With people from every race and nation,
with the Church of all the ages,
with apostles, evangelists and martyrs
we join the angels of heaven
in their unending song:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Hymn

1 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all
joy,
whose trust, ever child-like, no care
could destroy,
be there at our waking, and give us, we
pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the
break of the day.

2 Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the
plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours, and give us, we
pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the
noon of the day.

3 Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

4 Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Jan Struther (1901-1953), Text copyright OUP.

Offering ourselves to God

One or more of the following may be used

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

From St Patrick's Breastplate

Blessing

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing;
and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

*Words reproduced under CCLI licence 268920
and One License 730582-A*

Common Worship Texts © Archbishops Council 2000, 2002