

South Bay Community Church  
Sermon Reflections  
Chosen and Cherished Children  
5 March 2023  
Lead Pastor Tammy Long

**Scripture Text:** Mark 10:13-16; Mark 9:35-37

**Sermon Preamble**

We are continuing with our series, Chosen, as we draw closer to Easter. The big idea is for us to gain a fresh appreciation of the truth that Jesus has chosen us, so we may experience a deeper desire to choose Jesus day by day and moment by moment. So far in this Chosen series, we have considered that to be chosen means Jesus knows us by name, and Jesus invites us to come and see Him as we draw closer. Then we considered that to be chosen means we can find true rest for our souls, a Sabbath rest with Jesus and in Jesus. In this message, we will consider what it means to be chosen and cherished children deeply loved by Jesus.

**The video series gives us insight into 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish life, especially regarding the key teachings found in scripture on engaging with children**

Drawing from Season 1 Episode 3 of The Chosen video series, we see a side of Jesus that is consistent with Jesus as we know Him. Even though these scenes are not in the Bible, the writers of the video did a wonderful job of staying true to what Jesus might say and do based on what we know from key teachings of Jesus that are found in scripture.

From their research, The Chosen writers portrayed accurately 1<sup>st</sup> century life and times, as well as Jewish customs and culture reflecting details of what Jesus would have done. Since Jesus was Jewish, this episode gives us a wonderful gift of thinking about Jesus in new ways, especially as Jesus engages with children.

As you consider what it means to be chosen and cherished children, you are invited to think about at least one child, age 12 or younger, that you know. He or she may be your child, a grandchild, a niece, a nephew, or a neighbor. If you are not around children, perhaps it is a child you see from time to time, like someone at church. Lock them in your mind's eye and heart, as we hear the message God has for us.

**From our scripture text, it is clear that Jesus welcomes and embraces children.**

<sup>13</sup>“People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup>And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them, and blessed them.” (Mark 10:13-16).

<sup>35</sup>“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.’ <sup>36</sup>He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>‘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 9:35-37).

Both of these scriptural accounts are also found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Only in Mark is the tender phrase included about Jesus taking the children in his arms. We see in these scriptures from Mark that Jesus is literally embracing children. There is much to say in those few words, “in the arms of Jesus.” In the presence of Jesus, there is tenderness, affection, kindness, safety, and a welcoming space for all who draw near to Him. This is much like the scene depicted in The Chosen video.

*See Video Clip 1.* The child, Abby, discovered Jesus' camp the day before, and she watched him from a distance. She was tempted to take the food she saw, but she did not. Now, she is bringing a friend. She says she did not see a sword, so she thinks Jesus is a nice man, and she is curious about Him.

In this video, Jesus welcomes, loves, and embraces children. Jesus loves and embraces the children you are now holding in your mind's eye and heart. With all their questions and curiosity, children are simply real and honest. Often, they are still learning the conventions we call manners.

In this video, Jesus welcomes it all. Every question Abby throws, Jesus volleys back with patience and kindness. While not always telling her everything, Jesus always responds because Jesus welcomes and embraces children.

We know this to be true because of what we see in our scripture text. People were bringing little children to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them. It was customary to bring children to a distinguished rabbi on their first birthday to receive a blessing. So the children in our scripture are probably quite young. In Luke's gospel account, people were bringing babies to Jesus. Considering the crowds that were following Jesus with children in tow, there may have been more than babies; there were perhaps people bringing children for healing.

### **When Jesus saw the disciples send the children away, Jesus was indignant**

The disciples rebuked those who brought the children, and the Bible does not tell us why. Perhaps the disciples were trying to protect Jesus from the intrusion. Perhaps the disciples themselves did not want to be bothered. Or perhaps everyone was tired because it was late in the day. We all know children take a lot of energy. Whatever the reason, Jesus was indignant. <sup>14</sup>"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.'" Mark 10:14. The emotion in Jesus' response can get lost when we read the King James Version describing Jesus as "much displeased....Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not" (Mark 10:14 KJV). The wording from the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the King James Version was written loses some of its power today. The NIV translation says that Jesus was indignant. Indignant means expressing strong displeasure at something unjust, offensive, or insulting. The New Living Translation says Jesus was angry; the Message Bible says Jesus was irate. The original Greek word in the scripture indeed does mean indignant, it also includes the nuance of being "grieved." Jesus is vehemently displeased that the disciples are not allowing the children to come. This shows how precious and important children are to Jesus.

For Jesus, inviting the children was more than a ceremonial ritual. The response of Jesus is a double command for emphasis. Jesus tells the disciples "let the children come" and "do not hinder them." Can you imagine the delight of the parents when they hear Jesus' strong response, and their shock when Jesus adds, "The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Jesus welcomes and embraces children because they too belong in the Kingdom of God.

### **Jesus took the children into His arms, placed hands on them, and blessed them**

We don't have any more details from the biblical scripture, but can you imagine that Jesus took each child one by one and said a customized prayer of blessing from His heart to the children's heart. Jesus still welcomes and embraces children today. In our church, we also want to bring all of our children to Jesus. After suspensions during the COVID crisis, we have been able to relaunch our children's ministry. Like Jesus, we want to welcome children, embrace them, and invite them into the Kingdom as our brothers and sisters.

### **As a church, we have to embrace and welcome our children to meet Jesus**

According to research by the Global Ministry Center 85% of practicing Christians declare they initially placed their faith in Jesus between the ages of 4 – 14 years old, with similar results from another survey by the International Bible Society. Barna Research Group found that children ages 5-13 have a 32% probability of accepting Christ, whereas, for youth and teens, the probability is lower at 14%.

Often, when we see later in life conversions or recommitments, there has been some prior encounter with Jesus, with the foundation started as a child. Therefore, as a church, we must welcome and embrace our children, bringing them to meet Jesus in whatever ways we can. It truly does take a village, meaning our whole church family. Think about the children in your mind's eye and heart and all the children in our church family. How might you help them get to know Jesus?

### **Many of us have the gift of working with children; let us discern how God would have us embrace children**

Might you share a few volunteer hours to embrace children? Opportunities exist in the classroom on a few Sundays, providing snacks, or preparing curriculum materials and projects. Perhaps it is spending time with the children in your life, by listening with the ears of Jesus, sharing stories of the love of Jesus from the Bible or your life. Perhaps it is having spiritual conversations. Perhaps it is praying for the children you know and their parents, who are always the primary teachers and disciple makers. Perhaps it is sharing tools like the Lectio Family App, a well-done family devotional.

We have a window with our children. Let us discern how God would have us respond like Jesus and invite our children into the presence of Jesus.

### **Jesus enjoys children; think of yourself as a child**

As we began, you were invited to think about a child you know. Now, let us think about ourselves as a child. Maybe you have old school photos you can look back on and remember. As you do so, you may be flooded with memories. You may remember playing on the playground, coming home from school, your friends and toys, what it felt like to be a child, including the vulnerability and dependence upon adults. Perhaps you remember thinking of God as your Heavenly Father, and Jesus as your friend. Perhaps you remember a time when life was just simple. It was not perfect, for we had fears and did childish things. You may remember the innocence.

Allow the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind yourself as a child. Perhaps it is a memory of something you loved to do, or your happy place, or something that makes you smile, or a time you felt cherished and loved, or a time of carefree innocence of just being a child. Do you see that precious little one that God made and knew by name? Let's look you as a child in your mind's eye and heart.

### **Your child self is still inside you when you become a child of God**

When we are talking about children, we are often speaking about chronological age. However, we are also talking about ourselves as children of God. Even as chronological adults, we too are chosen and cherished children. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:1). Let that sink into our minds for a moment; in God's eyes, we are all children. "The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love" (Psalm

147:11). “For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.” (Zephania 3:17).

There is something about children that Jesus particularly enjoys. Jesus says we need some of the qualities of children if we are to enter the Kingdom of God.

### **Receive the Kingdom of God like a little child**

Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15). Let’s watch *Video Clip 2* for insights of what receiving the Kingdom of God as a little child means. You are invited to enter the story as your child self. Put the younger you in this scene and feel what it would be like to be with these children and Jesus.

We see the children growing in their relationship with Jesus. They are helping Jesus with His work, asking questions, and getting to know Jesus as they exhibit childlike faith. They are considering possibilities and sharing ideas, but they are not critical, skeptical, or cynical as we tend to become as we grow older. Their relationship with Jesus is open, sincere, humble, and they like him. They are enjoying Jesus, and Jesus is enjoying them; that is what Jesus is after when Jesus chooses us and we choose Him.

Jesus wants us to possess a childlike faith that is simple, humble, dependent, loving, open, curious, full of wonder, joyful, and trusting. Simple faith is honest and true when we simply love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, as children love.

Childlike faith is simple, but not easy. As you hold your own child-self, you try to tap into some memories and feelings from your own childhood. However, not every childhood was pleasant. Over the years, we can get bruised and wounded. There are stories of loss of innocence; we learn to put on metaphorical masks and protective gear. We pick up defense mechanisms and learn to guard our hearts. Sometimes, we get bogged down with rituals we think God wants from us. We get burned and afraid to trust anyone, including God. But Jesus says come to me as a child; let me help you let all those things go away.

From the youngest to the oldest, followers of Jesus are chosen and cherished children.

### **Jesus also esteems and elevates children**

First, Jesus elevates children in light of the social strata of that day. In Jesus’ day, children were considered a gift from God and a blessing, but they were regarded more as a future blessing in contributing to the household, care for older family members, and joining in the business or work of the family. At this time in history, children were not highly regarded. But in typical Jesus style, Jesus flips the prevailing mindset about children. <sup>35</sup>“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, <sup>37</sup>‘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 9:35-37). “At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ <sup>2</sup> He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. <sup>3</sup> And he said: ‘Truly I tell You, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup>Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’” (Matthew 18:1-5). In 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, the least of these, “in the lowly position” was a child. Jesus was radical in his esteem for children, and He elevated them, just like he did women.

## **Cherished and chosen children of God of any age on our lifetime journey with Jesus**

*See Video Clip 3.* We are cherished and chosen children of all ages on a mission with Jesus. We are learning and growing into what it means to be children of God at any age. In the video, Jesus said that many times adults need the faith of children. We learn from the simple faith of the children in our midst. May we embrace, enjoy, and esteem the children God has entrusted to us and to our church family. Let us lead them to Jesus so that they may get to know Jesus for themselves. May we learn what it means to have childlike faith; this will not happen overnight. As adults, we have much to unlearn and relearn. We need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We need healing from the wounds and battle scars of living in this broken world. Childlike faith is something we can continue to grow into, and it will take a lifetime. Jesus is with us every step of the way.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDING FOR USE IN FAMILY GROUP**

### **Sermon Preamble**

-In what circumstances have you consciously and intentionally chosen Jesus day by day and even moment by moment?

### **The video series gives us insight into 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish life, especially regarding the key teachings found in scripture on engaging with children**

-For proper bible interpretation, why do you think it is important to consider the life, times, customs, and culture of the people who are the original audience of the scripture text?

### **From our scripture text, it is clear that Jesus welcomes and embraces children.**

-In what ways does Jesus welcome and embrace children?

### **When Jesus saw the disciples send the children away, Jesus was indignant**

-When the disciples sent the children away, the disciples show that they have failings. Like the apostles and disciples, why is it important that you accept that you will sometimes fail in following Jesus, but you forgive yourself and move forward in your life journey?

-Jesus was indignant. What does indignant mean? In what circumstances when following Jesus have you exhibited human emotions?

### **Jesus took the children into his arms, placed hands on them, and blessed them**

- Why is it significant that Jesus took the children into His arms and blessed them, showing great love for the children?

### **As a church, we have to embrace and welcome our children to meet Jesus**

-At what age did you initially place your faith in Jesus Christ?

-Surveys show that practicing Christians initially placed their faith in Jesus Christ predominately between the ages of 4-14 years old. Considering these statistics, why is it critical for you to help children get to know Jesus?

### **Many of us have the gift of working with children; let us discern how God would have us embrace children**

- How can we discern in what ways God would have us respond and invite our children into the presence of Jesus? What opportunities are there for you to share volunteer hours to embrace children?

### **Jesus enjoys children; think of yourself as a child**

-As a child, consider something you loved to do, a time you felt loved and cherished, or a time of carefree childhood innocence. Guided by the Holy Spirit, what memories do you have of yourself as a child?

### **Your child self is still inside you when you become a child of God**

-In what ways do you consider yourself today as a chosen and cherished child of God?

### **Receive the Kingdom of God like a little child**

-The Kingdom of God is to be received as a little child, without self-consciousness and in dependence on the giver. What things in your life stop you today from having childlike faith that need to be resolved?

**Jesus also esteems and elevates children**

- What characteristics of childlike faith are necessary to enter the Kingdom of God?
- In what ways did Jesus esteem and elevate children beyond the prevailing view of society in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine?

**Cherished and chosen children of God of any age on our lifetime journey with Jesus**

- We need to learn what it means to have childlike faith. As adults, we have much to unlearn to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Why is this process a journey that takes a lifetime?