

Children are People Too
Luke 18:15-17

The disciples often thought of themselves as receptionists for Jesus. There are several instances in the gospels in which they try to turn away people whom they decided were not important enough to take up Jesus' time. The text for today's lessons is about one of those occasions. Some mothers wanted to bring their children to Jesus so that he could place his hands on them and bless them. The disciples didn't want Jesus to waste his time on these children. After all, children are weak and helpless. They are pretty worthless. At least that is the way the disciples and others of their time thought of them. They had potential to be worth something when they were old enough to work. But until then, they were just liabilities.

So, the disciples told the mothers to go away and take their children with them. But Jesus did something that has forever changed the way we think of children. He scolded the disciples for trying to turn the children away. He said, "Let them come to me. In the kingdom of heaven, these are very important people." Jesus took those children in his arms. He talked to them. He probably told them how important they are to God and how much God loves them. Then he took them one by one and offered up a special prayer of blessing for each one of them.

In so doing, Jesus taught us that children are people too. They are to be treated with dignity and respect, as are all people in the kingdom of heaven.

Of course, children have always been important to their parents. However, we need to recognize that all children are important, because they are all our children.

Becky and I were married seven years before our first one came along. To tell you the truth, I had given up. But that was all right. We enjoyed each other. There were children in the church, and I enjoyed them. Becky was teaching. The children in her classroom were her children.

Even though we did eventually have children and grandchildren of our own, I have always felt like the children of the church and the community were ours too.

I believe that is the way Christ wants us to feel. All the children are ours to enjoy and to take care of.

Because of the influence of the teachings of Christ on our society, Americans have always felt a responsibility for the children. One reason we enjoy the quality of life we have is because each generation has wanted a better life for the children of the next generations. However, I'm afraid we may be losing this.

I'll never forget a conversation I had with a woman a few years ago. She was complaining about her school tax. She said, "My children are up and grown. Why should I have to pay school taxes? They're not my children." I asked her where her children had gone to school. She said they went to these same schools, only they were much newer and nicer when her kids went through them. "They've just let those schools go to pot," she said. I asked her how much school tax she paid when her kids went through school. She said, "About six or seven hundred dollars a year." I said, "So, all your children went to a nice new school for six or seven hundred dollars a year? I'm

certain it cost much more than that to educate each one of your children. Who paid the rest?" She said, "The government."

The last time I checked, the government was not generating income. Her children got a good education because many people who didn't have children in school were paying their school taxes. And they paid those taxes because they considered all the children, including hers, to be their own. They were willing to do what it took to see that the children of that community got a good education.

That's the way Americans have always been. One generation takes care of the next generation. They are all our children and our grandchildren.

I believe that is exactly what Jesus wants us to do. Every child is important to him. He wants every child to grow up healthy and strong in mind, body and soul.

God has created us in such a way that it takes all of us, working together to make that happen.

Many children do not grow up healthy and strong because too many people aren't doing their part to take care of them. They are saying, "They are not my children. Why should I care?"

The answer is that people cared about them when they were children. And people cared about their children. The wonderful lifestyle that we enjoy today is the result of generations before us who worked hard to make a better way of life for their children, and not just their children, but all the children. We owe it to the generations who came before us to do the same.

I recall an old man who was a member of a church I served while I was going through seminary. He was reminiscing about his childhood. He was orphaned by the Great Flu Epidemic. He was the oldest child. He was about twelve years old. They lived on a cotton farm. His neighbor came to him that spring and said, "Son, you need to make a cotton crop in order to take care of yourself and your brothers and sisters." The boy said, "We don't have a mule to plow the ground." The neighbor said, "I've got an extra mule I can let you have." The boy asked, "How much do I owe you for the mule?" The neighbor said, "Here's what you owe me for the mule: When you get a chance to help somebody in the future, you do it. That's payback enough for me." When the old man finished that story, he looked at me, and he said, "I've spent my life paying my neighbor back."

We've got a wonderful way of life because our neighbors treated us like we were their own children. How can we pay them back? Treat your neighbors' children like they were your own. That's payback enough.

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