



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

Bless You!

Mark 10.13–16

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MOTHERS (FROM 2014)

As we all know, today is Mother's Day. It is a day to celebrate the blessing and beauty of motherhood in its many expressions, and there are many sayings that do just this: An old Hebrew Proverb says that "God couldn't be everywhere at once so God created mothers." A Spanish saying adds that "An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy," and even I have to agree. And yet another that says, "Moms. They're like dads, only smarter." Again, difficult for me to disagree.

GREG'S BIBLE

As many of you, I spent part of last week in my home state of Arizona where I was raised by my mother until the age of 16 when she died from cancer. While back my uncle gave me some memorabilia that he had uncovered while cleaning out the attic. In that pile of papers was this, a note that is titled "12/25/1986 Greg's Bible" and the following:

Faith is a gift of God. It is not a material that can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted or touched; but it is as real as anything that can be perceived with the senses. One can be as aware of faith as easily as one can be aware of earth. Faith is certain as the existence of water. Faith is as sure as the taste of an apple, the fragrance of a rose, the sound of thunder, the site of the sun, the feel of a loving touch. Hope is a wish, a longing for something not now possessed, but with the expectation of getting it. Faith adds surety to the expectation of hope.

I don't know if this was written in a Bible that I had, or was meant to be copied into a Bible I would get. I don't know if my mother copied it from another source, or wrote it—if so she missed her calling as a theologian or poet or preacher. What I do know is that those words are a blessing.

MARK 10.13–16

People were bringing little children to him [Jesus] in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little

2 *children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

BLESSING CHILDREN

When we read this scripture we can easily walk away feeling like this is yet another case where Jesus' disciples were being their usual thick-headed selves, pushing away children from Jesus. But let me give a little background in defense of the disciples.

In Jesus' time, children were often viewed as a present-day burden to bear with hope of a future payoff. This is why the disciples tried to turn the children away. They thought that Jesus had better things to do. But as Jesus has a habit of doing, he turned convention on its ear, and ordered the disciples to step aside and let the children come. Instantly children are people too and this was groundbreaking.

But then Jesus takes it another step and instructs his listeners to *be like children to enter the kingdom of God*. Not that we should be child-ish. But like children in that we should place our trust—and our lives—in the hands of God who is like a mother and father to us. Just as loving adults provide accountability, protection, forgiveness and grace for their children, we too can trust that God will provide the same for us. It is here we enter God's reign. [Another reminder that greatness in God's eyes not about power and influence but about faith and trust.¹] But only are children full people and not only are we to be like children.

Then finally, as if to drive home his point once and for all, Jesus *blesses* the children. All the parents wanted was for Jesus to lay a hand on their daughters and sons. But he goes on to take them in his arms and bless them with words. This morning right here in worship with Jesus as our example we

¹It's no coincidence that in Mark, the very next thing out of Jesus' mouth is, "How hard it will be for those with wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!" (Mk 10.17), followed by the parable of the Rich Young Ruler.

offered a blessing for our children to let them know that they are a part of what God is doing as much as we are, and that they are valuable and important right now. A blessing of children is a visible reminder of the inclusive nature of God's revolutionary love. And, a reminder that blessings matter. Jesus took them into his embrace and he *spoke* words of blessing. Words matter.

Words of blessing are often more difficult for us than actions of blessing. We think: Who am I to bless someone else? Do I have that authority? That strength? That vulnerability? What will they think of me?

HARD TO BLESS NOW, WHY?

We know the value of blessing one another and the world. And this congregation is very good at that indeed. We support one another in difficult times, lovingly prepare meals, give rides, go out of our way, to give our time and attention, prepare disaster relief buckets, generously offer financial resources, serve on church teams and committees, resettle refugee families, visit those imprisoned, These are blessings, to be sure. And they are valuable, these are blessings through action. It's said that actions speak louder than words and these actions speak loudly.

KNOCK-KNOCK

Lone gone are the days in the Davidson Laszakovits home when we would tell a lot of knock-knock jokes. I miss those days. And so I am pleased that this is one of those rare instances in life when a sermon topic legitimately intersects with a knock-knock joke. Brace yourselves.

Knock knock *Who's there?*

Hatch hatch *Hatch hatch who?*

God Bless you!

Why is it that words which come so easily after someone sneezes— words based on a pre-scientific superstition! — often get stuck in back of our throats when we're talking about real health concerns? Or life's serious problems? Or simply a passing blessing of good will?

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But still we hold back words of blessing. Sometimes we hold back blessing because we think what someone *really needs is*...something else. We don't bless our sons and daughters because what they really need is... direction. We don't bless our neighbor because what they really need is...to stop leaving their junk against our fence. We don't bless our politicians because what they need is...I'll let you fill in the blank on that one.

We often hold back verbal blessing because we assume what someone really needs is something else.² And *sometimes* we don't even think they deserve that. "They got themselves into this situation and they're just going to have to get themselves out," right?

But... sometimes *what we really need is* just a word of praise or encouragement. A reminder that we are God's very own, we too are children of God no matter how old we are.

Yet still, I get it. It is an easy thing to do, to bless children—they are adorable and it's easy to overlook and forgive any shortcomings. Now, adults, we are a very different story—our ugly habits and rough edges are not so easily overlooked.

Author Henri Nouwen reminds us:

To bless means to say good things. We have to bless one another constantly. Parents need to bless their children, children their parents, partners their partners, [husbands their wives, wives their husbands,] friends their friends. In our society, so full of curses, we must fill each place we enter with our blessings. We forget so quickly that we are God's beloved children...we have to be reminded of our belovedness and remind others of theirs.

You know sometimes we can't find the right words, and sometimes we can't find the right attitude. When we can't find the right attitude, when we feel like we just don't have it in us to utter a good word to someone, think of a blessing as borrowed words. When we can't find the right spirit attitude

²Martin B. Copenhaver, *Still Speaking...* devotional resource.

to share a blessing, we know God can and we can always offer God's blessing.

BLESSING AS CONSECRATING FOR GOD'S PURPOSE

We bring ourselves much closer to each other when we bless one another. The question is not *Who am I to bless someone?* but *Who am I not to ask God's blessing for someone?* And yes, this is a blessing that can be done face-to-face in word and deed.

When we can't find the words just remember what Nouwen said: *to bless simply means to say good things.*

You can do this! You are awesome!

I love the way you welcome people into your home.

Your leadership means a lot to me.

Your hugs are the best!

Congratulations! I wish you well.

May God bless you in your studies.

I pray God-speed as you travel.

You are a wonderful mother.

You have been as a mother to me in so many good ways.

BENEDICTION BLESSINGS, FRIENDS

I want to offer you a challenge today: bless three people. Let them know why you appreciate them and ask God to bless them for God's good work. I'll start first:

May God bless each and every one of you as a child of God. May you share who are abundantly in word and action. Amen.

