

“Ripples of Hospitality”

Third in the Series “Ripples: Draw the Circle Wide”

Hebrews 13:1-2; Mark 10:13-16

May 3, 2026 (Preschool 60th Anniversary Celebration)

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Hebrews 13:1-2

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to him 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 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.

Sermon

When I was in the Girl Scouts back in the **1970s**, one of the badges I earned was the **Hospitality Badge**. The badge featured a steaming cup of tea or coffee. We had to learn about proper etiquette for entertaining and for other settings. I mainly remember learning about how to set a formal table with lots of silverware and dishes (which I love). However, I now live with people who are happier with one plate and one utensil or, better yet, paper plates!

Hospitality in our culture often has a sense of reciprocity: I invite you to dinner, you invite me to dinner. Hospitality can be for personal gain. When we think about hospitality we think first of being hospitable to people we know and like.

Jesus modeled a much broader hospitality.

“In the culture of Jesus’ time where honor and shame were decisive factors in determining behavior, people would be very eager to welcome someone of **high** status whose company could increase their own honor. Children, however, were of very low status at that time and in that culture. Spending time with children didn’t increase anyone’s status. Spending time

with children was considered a waste of time, especially for those who wanted to be important.” (workingpreacher.org)

That’s probably why the disciples spoke sternly to the parents and children who wanted to see Jesus. The disciples were still learning, and they didn’t understand fully the heart of Jesus.

Jesus chose to spend time with people and to extend hospitality to people who could NOT increase his status. Instead of spending most of his time “rubbing elbows” with people or “networking” with people who could advance him and his cause, he spent time with those who were poor, injured, sick in body and mind, strangers, and the very evident “sinners” around him who were marked with the “Scarlett Letters” of his day. He also spent time with children.

Jesus welcomed children despite his disciple’s objections. Can’t you hear the disciples: “Jesus, with all due respect, we don’t have time for this. You have more important people to see and more important places to go. We are on a mission. Stopping for these kids will not get you anywhere.”

But Jesus said: “Let the little 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.”

Strangely, Jesus is saying “Welcome the kingdom like you would welcome a child.” Earlier when the disciples were debating about which of them was the greatest, Jesus said: “Whoever wants to be first will be last of all and **servant of all.**” Then he took a child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms said: “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Why is this significant? Jesus is saying when we receive God . . . when we welcome God into our lives, **we should do so in the same manner as he welcomed children.** Jesus didn’t welcome the children to be great . . . to grow an empire . . . to be popular or to gain status. Jesus did not welcome children to increase his status. And that’s how it should be when we welcome God into our lives. It’s not to be prosperous. It’s not to have an easier life. It’s not for status.

As you know, I really enjoy children, even though children can be exhausting to watch because they have so much energy. At soccer, I watch children play before their games, then run hard and play hard during their games, then while their siblings are playing, they find a place on our grounds to keep playing soccer or football or to just run around. They do cartwheels and flips or roll on the ground. There is so much energy. Welcoming children is exhausting.

When I welcome children, I'm usually filled with joy and wonder. But I also recognize that time spent with children is not considered to be the most career-enhancing. Some might even say it's not the best use of the church's time. Why do we care so much about children and welcome them to every part of our church experience? Sometimes churches say: **"What do we gain by welcoming children who seemingly have nothing to give in return?" The disciples asked this of Jesus, and people still ask today: "What's in it for us?"**

When we welcome children it involves service and sacrifice. It can be exhausting. Time with children isn't about us and what we gain. It's about them.

So the connection is this: **Welcome God into your life** like we ideally welcome children. Welcome God with joy and wonder (like you ideally welcome children). **Light up** as you do when a child runs into your arms when you think about God and welcome God into your life. Most importantly, don't enter into a relationship with God thinking "What can God do for me?" How can God increase my status? (We don't do that when we welcome children, right?) Rather, enter a relationship with God asking: "What can I do to serve God and the people with whom God surrounds me?" Enter into a relationship with God to serve and sacrifice for God's purposes, not for what we will get in return. "Entering God's kingdom, even as we live our daily lives, is not a way to become first or great but a way to identify with the least and to serve simply for Jesus' sake." (workingpreacher.org) Welcome God and God's Kingdom even now as you would welcome a child, expecting nothing, but receiving everything that truly matters.

We welcome children here for many reasons and do so with joy. One of them really is so that we can learn how to welcome and embrace the Kingdom of God, expecting nothing in return, but receiving everything that truly matters.