

Just Kidding Around!

[Text - Mark 10:13-16]

Pastor Dave Shackle
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Last week when I was in Columbus, I had a great time with my grandson, Quinn, who is counting-down the days to his BIG 5th birthday. He told me how much he likes having a grandpa who runs around the house with him, jumps on the trampoline, and acts just as silly as he does! I told him I really like that too, and hope that he'll still like doing these things with me as he gets older. Quinn looked-up at me and said, "Don't worry about that, Grandpa. When I get older, you'll be too old to do these things anyway!" [Ouch! Out of the mouths of babes....]

In this morning's New Testament reading, Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Realm of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Realm of God like a little child will never enter it!"

According to Jesus, a person's capacity to enter and participate in the Divine Realm has nothing to do with one's *age* [thank God!] However, it has everything to do with one's *attitude*. The wonderfully inclusive Divine Realm simply can't include our adult-acquired taste for self-righteous judgements, narrowminded prejudices, or unfounded fear and distrust of those who are different from us. What is included and welcomed is a child-like spirit of openness and acceptance, trust and empathy, wonder and joy. And though far from perfect, our open and affirming Family of Faith is an excellent venue for subduing some of those negative characteristics that our power-driven society often instills in us. This Community offers us tremendous opportunities - and encouragement - for practicing those Christ-like qualities of inclusion and acceptance, compassion and grace. To support us in this important endeavor, we as a Church celebrate two Sacraments, which reinforce and strengthen our spiritual growth. And the way we celebrate these Sacraments speaks volumes about what we truly believe and strive to achieve.

Here at Brecksville United Church of Christ, we recognize that the invitation to come to the Waters of Holy Baptism, and to partake of the Bread and Cup of Holy Communion, is an invitation extended to *all people*. therefore our Sacramental Celebrations truly are “come as you are parties” - where all are warmly welcome in the name of Christ, our gracious Host. Jesus Christ never turns-away anyone for not being pious or pure enough. To the contrary, he seems a bit turned off by those who think that their own piety or purity makes them better or more valuable than others.

The Good News that Jesus proclaims, is that God’s Gracious Spirit can change our fearful and judgmental spirits into spirits that are open and joyful; turn our darkness into light; our despair into hope; and even transform our dying into a pathway to new Life. This is the Good News that *every* person - young or old alike - needs and longs to hear: that they truly are loved and treasured children of God - and that there is always a place of welcome for them within God’s expansive and eternal Realm.

Jesus also teaches and demonstrates that the Divine Realm is a *gift* - a free, yet precious gift - which can only be received as such. Too often, the bigger we get, and the more sophisticated we become, the more we can misunderstand this gift. We see it as something that we somehow earn or deserve; something exclusive to *us*, or those like us; something which is ours to control and contain. Therefore rather than receiving this marvelous gift with the joy and excitement of a little child, we take it on as a burden - as our own personal cross to bear, or sacred relic to hoard and protect. Yet the gift of the Divine Realm is extended to all people, regardless of who they are or where they may be in their Life’s journey. It’s *God’s* Gift to give, not our own. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, you and I are invited and inspired to be the vessels through whom this Gift can live and grow, evolve and spread.

This morning, we all celebrate together the wonderful gift of Juliana’s Baptism into the Community of Faith. This gracious Gift blesses her,

her family, our Church Family and potentially countless others whose lives will be touched by her own. That might seem like a lot to expect from a simple Sunday morning ceremony! Yet as Jesus reminds us, in the Divine Realm, it's the little things - and the little ones - that can shape and change the world! And he also reminds us that we are never too *old* to participate in the process - thank God!