

A Flexible Faith that Fits
[Text - Mark 10:13-16]

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An American was visiting several small towns in Europe. He didn't know much about their history, so he would check with the local residents, to see if those places had any claim to fame. One day he saw a young boy walking down the street, and said to him, "Excuse me, but were there any great men or women born in this town?" The boy looked up and said, "No sir, the only people born around here are little tiny babies!"

We all begin as little tiny babies, but something happens along the way. The years fly-by, and we grow-up. [Well, *some* of us grow-up...] Some grow to do great things, and their names and stories become a part of history. Others may grow to do even greater things, yet we never even know their names.

According to Jesus, in the Divine Realm, genuine greatness is measured quite differently than it is in our day-to-day world. In fact, Jesus teaches that there's often an inverse difference between the Divine understanding of greatness, and the worldly one. In the Divine Realm, it is the little ones who are the most precious; the lowly who are exalted; and the meek, not the mighty, who inherit the earth. The Holy One who Jesus reveals has this remarkable way of taking people who appear small or insignificant, and inspiring them to do remarkable things. Our Divine, Life-Giving Source can take a situation that may seem like a hopeless dead-end, and transform it into an opportunity for new life and amazing possibilities. Essentially, that's the story of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. That's the heart of the Christian message. And it's the same message that you and I are called to share with all the people around us: that Divine Life and Love will ultimately prevail! That the Holy One can - and will - make all things new!

Here at Brecksville United Church of Christ, we understand that the invitation to receive the renewing Water of Holy Baptism, and to partake of the Life-giving Bread and Cup of Holy Communion, is an invitation extended to *all*. Jesus Christ never turns-away anyone because they aren't pious or "pure" enough. To the contrary, he seems a bit turned-off by those who feel that their own piety or purity puts them above others. The Good News which Jesus proclaims and demonstrates, is that the Creative, Life-giving Holy Spirit is available to us all; bringing Light out of our darkness, Hope out of despair, Life out of death, and making something special out of seemingly nothing.

That Good News - that Gospel - can begin as the tiniest seed, which takes hold in our hearts, and then grows and expands and blossoms. And no matter how young or old, great or small - all people need to hear that Good News: that *they* are a loved and treasured child of the Holy One.

This morning, we have formally welcomed two of God's beautiful children into this Family of Faith. Of course Amy and Carrie already are an important part of this Church, and perfectly loved by their Heavenly Parent. But today with their baptism they have been symbolically and Sacramentally immersed in the Water of Life - Water which represents the cleansing, refreshing, and Life-renewing Gift of the Holy One.

Jesus proclaims that the Divine Realm is a *gift* - a holy and precious gift - which can only be received as such. Too often, the older we get, and the more sophisticated we become, the more we misunderstand this gift. We see it as something exclusive to *us*, or to those who are like us; as something which is ours to limit or control. Therefore instead of receiving this gift with the joy and excitement of a child, we take it on as a sacred prize to protect and hoard. So rather than receiving this Divine Gift with open hands, and freely extending it to others, we hold it with clenched fists, and cautiously try to guard it for ourselves.

Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Divine Realm like a little child will never enter it!"

To enter and fully participate in the Divine Realm requires a child-like spirit of openness and acceptance, welcome and wonder. The radically *inclusive* nature of the Divine Realm simply cannot *include* those grownup preferences for exclusion, prejudice, and judgement. And though far from perfect, this open and affirming Community of Faith is an excellent place for extinguishing those negative impulses that our power-driven society often instills in us; and for practicing those Christ-like qualities of compassion, inclusion, and grace. This is a place where our faith, hope and love can continually deepen and grow, evolve and expand.

Just as the tiniest seed can develop into something tremendously substantial and productive, so can every child of the Holy One. To do so, however, requires a Faith that is flexible and living, gracious and expansive, open and affirming. A Faith that can grow with us - and that we can grow into - at every stage and age of our lives.