

**TFTD 25.28 Friday April 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Like a little child: Luke 18.15-17**



**Thanks to the Revd John Murray of the Anglican Chaplaincy in Strasbourg for today's reflection.**

**People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and 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 like a little child will never enter it.'**

**We often express regret that there aren't enough children in church these days. I used to be deposited at Sunday school every week, but times have changed, and the days of large Sunday schools seem to be over. You probably know the imposing Sunday School building in Roe Street, Macclesfield. When it opened in 1812, 1,127 boys and 1,324 girls were registered as members. We can still admire the building; but of course it's no longer a Sunday School; it's a heritage centre.**

**Churches today very often state as one of their objectives: to bring in more children and young people. The only trouble is that if more children**

and young people do come in, and if they join the main service, you start to hear complaints that they make too much noise, disturbing the adult worshippers. (“In my day”, people will say, “children were taught to behave themselves and keep quiet in church.”)

Jesus’s disciples would have agreed. Jesus had important things to say, a grown-up message for grown-ups. Taking it upon themselves to maintain order among the crowds that flocked to hear Jesus, they found that children were just a nuisance: they get in the way, they are noisy, they should be seen and not heard.

So when people started pushing their way to the front to try and get Jesus to touch their children, the disciples felt that things were getting out of hand, and they tried to stop them.

But Jesus clearly liked children, and besides he was never prepared to turn people away – not even little children. So he overruled his disciples and called the children forward.

At the same time, he came out with some surprising words: it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs; and he even went so far as to say that whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

So what have children got to do with the kingdom of God? Well, for a start we all know that children ask the best questions about God. As adults we have a tendency to try and show off by asking “clever” questions. But children come straight out with it and ask those deceptively simple, direct questions which so often put us on the spot. Where is God? What does God look like? Why did lots of people not like Jesus? Why did they kill him? What happens when I say my prayers? And so on...

But quite apart from their searching questions, children also have a kind of natural spirituality.

They have a sense of wonder. Wide-eyed wonder at things, wonder that takes them out of themselves. The kind of wonder that is the

beginning of worship. Whereas we adults have taught ourselves to be sensible, sophisticated, sceptical, questioning. It is hard work for us to regain a capacity for simple wonder.

Children know that they are dependent, dependent on others to look after them; they are not in control. Whereas we adults have spent our time learning to be autonomous, agents of our own lives, self-sufficient, in charge. It is hard for us to relearn radical dependency on a God who is infinitely greater than anything we can conceive. It is hard for us to relearn humility.

Children know all about trust. Being dependent, they have to trust those who look after them. Trustingly, a child puts their hand in yours, and sometimes we are nervous at the responsibility this implies. But as we grow up, we learn that you can't always trust people. We learn to be cautious about giving ourselves to others, suspicious about their motives, because life has taught us that sometimes we will be hurt. But trust is what faith is all about, and so we have to learn that we really can entrust ourselves wholly to God, without reserve, just as children have to entrust themselves wholly to their parents.

Wonder, dependency, trust: this is why Jesus tells us to be like children, and tells us moreover that we must become like children if we want to enter the kingdom. Lent is a good time to open ourselves afresh to wonder at the world God has placed us in; to learn that it is he who is in control, and not we ourselves; and to learn to trust him without reserve, without holding anything back.

**John Murray**