Mark 10:13-16 Baptism of Bennett Holden (6-25-23)

'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.'

To whom does the kingdom of God belong? We live in a world where some folks like to have litmus tests for the kingdom. Some might proclaim that if you don't believe one interpretation of Scripture or another, you are not welcome in the kingdom of God. And today, we learn something different, directly from Jesus' lips. The kingdom belongs to us all, even the youngest, the ones who don't know any scripture yet, the ones who ask "why" about everything, the ones who are viewed as problematic, the ones who can't sit still…

And the beautiful thing is that Jesus follows on that statement about children by saying we'd be wise to imitate children – to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. It invites us too, we big people, we old people, into ownership of the kingdom, by approaching it as a child would. A child, who is not already aware of what questions we are and aren't supposed to ask, as a child who is frustrated by how there aren't easy answers to our question, as a child who simply wants to feel the love of something larger than himself and senses that there is one who loves him most of all, in that kingdom realm.

This passage comes right after Jesus has had yet another tussle with the Pharisees, who were asking him questions that they thought were trick questions, try to show him to be a heretic, and everyone's teeth were on edge. He answered them beautiful and lovingly, showing them his way of love, but the whole business had raised the anxiety of the disciples, who wondered how this little bit of an argument would play out later. And so the disciples were trying to keep the children in the crowd, children who had heard some of this back and forth, away from Jesus. The disciples' hearts were in the right place – give the Boss a rest! Stay back!. But Jesus wanted nothing more than the children with him at that time. Those children who would listen to him and feel the love. Those children who wouldn't try to win an argument based on bad interpretation of ancient law. Those children who would clamber up into his lap and tell him stories, and he'd laugh with them and tell them some stories too.

Those open-hearted, trusting children who knew love when they saw it, and felt it , and heard it.

This day when we baptize a beloved child, Bennet Holden, we remember how Jesus invited children to be with him, in his lap and in the kingdom. He gave it to them, and gave it to all of us, on one condition: that we would recognize this gift of pure love as simply as a child would.

That is one of the reasons why we renew our own baptismal covenant when we baptize: so we remember what it is like to be a child again before our Savior, not knowing much of anything except that we are invited into the kingdom, too, not trying to guess who's best at it or who's worst at it.

Simply remembering how Jesus loves us, and how we can best respond to that love. So when we renew that baptismal covenant, remember what we promised, or what was promised for us. Remember how we've not always lived up to those promises as fully as we might. Remember with humility how Jesus invited us to be owners of the kingdom by being like little children. Remember the grace we receive to be forgiven our sins. And remember, too, that childlike openness to the love we receive, and the love we can share. The love that Bennet will be baptized into in a few minutes. The love that we share at as we receive the bread and the wine. The love that will guide us to help shape Bennett's understanding of this great gift as he grows. May he be blessed as you have been blessed, and may you be a blessing as he will be.

Amen.