



St John Lutheran Church

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Text: Matthew 11: 25-30

Theme: The Childishness of the Christian Faith

At some point, most of us have been confronted by those who question (or reject outright) the practice of infant Baptism. **Young children, they** argue, don't know what is going on... **they** have no way of understanding the Christian faith... **and** no means of making a personal commitment. **No one should** be baptized, they say, until they have grown up enough to decide for themselves.

On the surface, by human standards and reason, all of this **sounds** pretty good. **Just plain common** sense, right? **The problem is that** it's completely wrong ... **Biblically and so....factually. Holy Scripture**, in fact reveals exactly the opposite.

Jesus doesn't say "let the grown-ups come to Me, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as them"? **He doesn't say**, "unless you grow up and become like an adult, you will never enter the Kingdom of God"? **No!** **Rather, our** Lord demonstrates on several occasions that little children are the model and example for us... **and** anyone who does not receive His Kingdom like a little child will by no means enter it.

By the same token, in our Gospel this morning, Jesus praises the Father because He has revealed Christ and His Gospel to infants, and not to the wise and learned. (Our English translation says "little children," but the word in Greek really means "babies" or "infants", very little children, in other words.) **Which means, for** all of us, that we must become like infants... **like** helpless little children... **if** we are to enter the Kingdom of God. **But what does** this mean... **to** become like an "infant" before God? **Obviously, it does** not mean that only physical babies will know God (although it surely ought to silence those who want to withhold the treasures of Christ from infants and young children).. **To become "infants"** is simply another way of describing the nature of faith ... **a** very good way... **perhaps** the best description of all.

We've all seen infants. **And even for** those who have been parents before, it is always a bit shocking to see again the utter helplessness and tiny frailty of a newborn. **Someone must do** absolutely everything for an infant... **feeding**, clothing, cleaning, holding, rocking, soothing ... **every** day... twenty-four hours a day.

Otherwise, it is brutally simple... **the** child will die.

And infants do have a sense of that. **Call it "instinct," but a newborn** infant will automatically search for his or her mother's milk. **And a newborn** infant will quickly respond with recognition to the voices and presence of Mom and Dad. **A newborn infant** will cling ...**quite** literally for dear life... **to** the parents whom God has provided.

With that picture in mind, understand that this is where you and I stand in relation to our heavenly Father every day of our lives. **That is true** for everyone, whether they acknowledge our God or not. **God makes the** rain to fall and the sun to shine on all people... **just** as He gives daily bread to all people. **But as Christians**, we recognize His gracious hand of preservation in all these things...**and** in each and every breath that we take. **We understand that** God sustains us, utterly!

He must do absolutely everything for us ...**feeding**, clothing, holding, soothing... **everyday**, twenty-four hours a day. **Otherwise, we die. And so by** faith we look to Him for all that we need to support this body and life. **In the Words** of the Psalmist: "**The eyes of all look to Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season; Thou openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.**"// **In the same** way, by faith, we look to Christ, our Lord and Savior... **for** the forgiveness of our sins... **for** spiritual life and salvation. **And that is** what it means to be an infant before Him.

Now, being a "little child" could easily be a frightening and helpless experience, especially as we face the big, wide world and all its challenges. **And so, it** is only by faith in Christ that we are able to make it from one day to the next with confidence... **knowing** that our Heavenly Father has each of us and all things in His hands. **As**

we pray in the Collect of the Day, "**that the course of this world may be so governed by [His] direction,**" that we may live and rejoice as His children, "**in godly peace and quietness.**"// **That is the** confident peace of an infant cradled in the powerful arms of a tender and loving Father.. **For He is** our Father... **and** we are His children.

Unfortunately, our sinful human pride often rejects the peace of God, and we insist on trying to make it through life on our own. **We want to** "grow up" and assert our independence ... **independence** from God and from everyone else. **We all take** a certain pride in going it alone... **in** standing our ground against all odds... **in** being our own person, independent. **Sink or swim,** we all want to feel like we can face the world and make it on our own.

Eventually, however, we reach a point where we realize that we aren't going to make it on our own, no matter how hard we might try... a point at which we are reduced to "infancy," in the face of something that we simply cannot handle or control. **Facing death,** for example, can cause even proud adults to weep and cry like babies. **No amount of** stubborn human pride can ward off death for long... **and** we are forced (hopefully) to seek out the strong, comforting hand of our heavenly Father. **Without such trials** in our life, we might never look for help from our Lord... **we** might never become the "infants" we must be, who cling to Him for dear life.

But when God has first reduced us to infancy and the need for Him in this way... **by** using the trials and heartaches of this life to drive us back to Him... **He** then reveals Himself to us in Christ and brings us into His Kingdom, "**like newborn babies**" (as the Psalmist sings)... **That is the** way in which we are to hunger and thirst for the precious Word and Holy Sacraments of Christ our Lord ...**like** newborn babies, searching for our mother's milk. **That is the** very essence of faith: a simple and childish trust in Christ, like the trust of an infant in his or her parents. **We seek all** things from our heavenly Father, in and through Christ our Lord, and we rely solely on Him for all that we need... **both** for this life, and for the life to come.

Remember the story of Jesus and Nicodemous in the Gospel of John? **Nicodemous was actually** much closer to the truth than he could ever know. **He was being** sarcastic when he asked, but in a way he was quite right: "**Can a full-grown man enter again into his mother's womb, in order to be born again?**" **Well, yes, in a** sense. **He must be** born again... **he** must become like a newborn child. . . .

But the womb that he enters is not the physical womb of his earthly mother...**it** is rather the **womb** of the Church, the font of Holy Baptism. **For just as** the Church is described in Holy Scripture as the Bride of Christ, **so also is** she described as the Mother of all Christians. **And here, in** this font, is where she gives new birth to the children of God. **Here, in this** font, is where we receive the Kingdom of God like little children... **for** that is precisely what we have become in those holy waters.

Regrettably, there is a negative side to our childishness... a mischievous disobedience, which seeks to crawl out from under the care and supervision and authority of our heavenly Father. **Much like restless** teenagers we rebel from time to time, looking again for "freedom" and "independence" from God. **And so we** push the boundaries of His authority over us... **we** test the limits to see what we can get away with. **We keep striving** again for that feeling of independence, always wanting to "grow up" and make it on our own, to stand on our own two feet. **When that happens ...when** we fail to recognize and seek the gracious preservation of God... **when** we do not look to Him for all things necessary to body and soul ...**then** we have become the "wise" and "learned" adults who struggle and strive to make it through life on their own. **And at that point... the** Gospel is hidden from us.

Then...then, we are among the "**weak and heavy-leadened,**" the "**weary and burdened,**" whom Jesus invites to Himself in our Gospel this morning. **These words in** the Greek describe those who are worn out from their labor and toil, and burdened with a load of responsibilities. **We all know** that feeling. **Making a living** in this world is often backbreaking work, exhausting both mentally and physically. **Such hard work** would be commendable, unless it stems from an effort to make it on our own apart from God. **Those who try** will wear themselves down and burn themselves out...**and spiritually, they** are running in the wrong direction altogether. **But when we** end up running away like this and carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders, **Christ our Savior** does not just let us go or write us off. **He is always** coming after us... **rescuing** us from fatal disaster, and bringing us back to our Father. **And of course,** our loving heavenly Father welcomes us home with love and forgiveness... **urging** us to be His children,

to receive His Fatherly, Divine care and mercy toward us. **When we recognize** the Fatherly hand of God in this way, then we can live our lives and go about our work with joy and confidence, knowing that He is taking care of us, and no matter what... **He** is with us.

Likewise, living the Christian life is not burdensome for those who understand that Christ has already given us Himself and all good things....**forgiveness**, life, and salvation ...**freely**, with no strings attached. **His yoke is** not another heavy load or burden for us... **but** a joyful privilege and a sharing in His life. **For our Lord** is not a taskmaster... **but** a gentle Savior. **He has not** made us children of the Father in order to enslave us and put us to work, as though He needed anything from us. **No, He has** made us the children of God, so that we might live freely as members of His household and family. **His wish is** to free us of all our burdens!

The yoke of Christ might seem heavy and burdensome at times, that is until we find ourselves out from under it... **facing** life without our Father... **without** our Lord and Savior... **Until, once again**, we hit the "wall" and are forced to fall back into His arms. **Maybe it is** sickness or death... **maybe** depression or grief... **maybe** a sense of failure, or the accusations of our guilty conscience. **Take your pick**: our life is full to the brim with things that we can't handle. **Frankly, I don't** know how anyone survives one day apart from Christ. **There are those**, of course, who drag themselves through life without Him; but for me...**I** simply couldn't face this life, if not for the hope and confidence that Christ is going with me every step of the way..

Along with His power and might, we hear especially of the gentleness and tenderness of our Lord for His children. **And we see** especially in Christ, the obedient Son of the Father... **Who** humbled Himself unto death, like a sheep being led to the slaughter. **In fact, the** Holy Triune God is not revealed or known to us at all, except in Jesus Christ the Crucified. **And He continues** to humble Himself among us... **feeding** the children of His Father with Himself ...**His** precious Body, and His Blood of the New Covenant...**under** the humble means of simple bread and wine. **Here, is where** we know God as He is... **a** gentle Savior caring for His children. **So, you see**, the Parable of the Prodigal Son rings true. **The Father's house** remains open to us, and His arms are always stretching out to bring us back to Himself. **Time and time** again, our Savior tenderly invites: **"Come unto Me, you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest!"** **And by His** grace... **He** makes us little children once again... **infants**, cradled gently in His arms, safe and sound forever. **In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

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