

Fourth Sunday of Lent - March 15, 2026

Video Online Bible Study with Rev. Gary E. Mathiesen

“Tell Me Something Good”

~ Grounding Ourselves in the Good News of Lent ~ “The Good News Is ... Protection and Care for the Vulnerable”

Matthew 19:13-15 (Deuteronomy 24:17-22)

NOTES ON THE TEXT ~ Matthew 19:13-15 ~ “THE LITTLE CHILDREN AND JESUS”

~ SOME PRELIMINARIES ~

☞ Matthew, Mark and Luke record this event in their gospel account.

Matthew: “Children were brought to [Jesus] that he might lay his hands on them and pray.”

Mark: “... bringing children to [Jesus] that he might touch them.”

Luke: “... bringing even infants to [Jesus] that he might touch them ...”

Matthew, Mark & Luke: “... the disciples rebuked them ...”

Matthew: “... but Jesus said ...”

Mark: “... when Jesus saw it he was indignant ...”

Luke: “... but Jesus called the [children] to him ...”

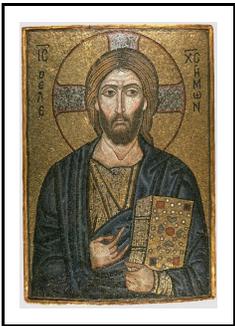
Matthew, Mark & Luke: “Let the children come to me, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”

Mark & Luke: “Truly, I say to you ...”

Matthew: “And [Jesus] laid his hands on them ...”

Mark: “And [Jesus] took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.”

~ THE SETTING ~ HOW CUTE ... OR IS IT?



* v. 13 “Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.” The image we want/have in our head is (most likely) of Jesus laughing or smiling with children in his lap (such as is depicted in this contemporary image to the right). However ...

* The European depiction of Jesus, evolving from early, varied imagery into a dominant, light-skinned, bearded figure with long hair, emerged during the Byzantine era (330 AD - 1453 AD as depicted in this 12th C. mosaic) and solidified during the Renaissance (1350 - 1600 AD). Artists often portrayed him in their own likeness or to resemble Roman, Greco-Roman, or later, Nordic/Aryan ideals.



* Children In Our Culture - “For children, we would do anything. We make them the center of our attention. We watch what they do. Marvel at how they grow. Attuned to what they say.” †

* Children In The First Century - “We should dismiss the ideas of childhood bliss when we read this passage. Childhood in antiquity was difficult. Fifty percent of children died before the age of five. They were the weakest members of society. They were fed last and received the smallest and least desirable

portions of food. They were the first to suffer from famine, war, disease, and natural disasters [along with sick and elderly]. Many, some say more than 70 percent, would have lost one or more parents before reaching puberty. A minor had the same status as an enslaved person, and it was not until adulthood that they would be considered a free person.” Michael Joseph Brown ††

* Children were among the most disposable, invisible and vulnerable population along the ladder of social status.

~ THE RECEPTION ... PART ONE ~

☞ v. 13 “... *the disciples rebuked [the parents] who brought [the children] ...*” Why would the disciples rebuke parents (others) from bringing children to Jesus to touch for a prayer/blessing? Probably trying to protect Jesus’ valuable time, but more importantly, they are keeping the social hierarchy in order.

☞ Spending time with children would have seemed wasteful or useless ... an invasive distraction. [Remember: children occupied one of the lowest rungs on the ladder of social status.] Leaders, like Jesus, were not expected to climb down the social ladder to their level and parents should not intrude upon the importance of what Jesus is doing (teaching adults).

~ THE RECEPTION ... PART TWO ~

☞ v. 14 “*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them ...*”

* Mark draws a sharper contrast between the response of the disciples and Jesus ... he records that Jesus was “indignant” that the children and parents were being shooed away. Mark uses the word “indignant,” “resentful,” or “vexed” - an emotion that rises when an action or situation is judged offensive or unjust.

☞ We have all been vulnerable at one time or another ... relying upon the protection and care of others. Vulnerable should not only just be protected from harm, but cared for so they have a chance to thrive.

* Matthew 18:1-5 - Humble yourself like a child to enter into the reign of God.

* BUT ... once again ... it is the vulnerable that find their way to Jesus for attention (“sinners”, women, lepers, children, the lame, tax collectors, etc.).

~ GOING BEYOND THE CHILDREN . . . JESUS AND THE SOCIAL ORDER OF THE DAY ~

☞ v. 14 “... *for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*” The kingdom of heaven = the presence of God. WHO are the “these”?

☞ Contrast: The story of the Rich Young Man (Matthew 19:16-30) - Here is a man that is very high on the social ladder. He has riches - a sign of blessing from God. He knows and has kept all the commandments of God - his spirituality is impeccable and of the highest regard. And yet ... “... *it is hard for a rich [person] to enter the kingdom of heaven.*” This man - among the highest on the social status ladder does NOT enter the kingdom of heaven.

☞ v. 14 “... *[Jesus] ... placed his hands on [the children] ...*” Again ... Jesus touches the outcast the vulnerable ... the “sinner” ... the Gentile.

☞ Several instances of Jesus touching or being touched (Mtt 9:21; Mtt 14:36; Luke 18:15; Luke 4:40; Mark 16:18; Mark 8:23-25; Luke 13:13; John 9:6). In each case it expresses compassion and authority ... TO THE VULNERABLE.

☞ “These” - Those who are not able to care for themselves or change their circumstances that they themselves as well as society consider outside the place of God’s blessing and presence (the kingdom of heaven). This brings us to Deuteronomy 24:17-22 ...

NOTES ON THE TEXT ~ DEUTERONOMY 24:17-22 ~ “THE VULNERABLE . . . A MATTER OF DUTY, GRACE AND RESOURCES”:

v. 17 “Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.” v. 18 “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.” v. 19 “When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.” v. 20 “When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.” v. 21 “When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.” v. 22 “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.”

☞ Notice the imperative repetition in this text ... “Do not ...” “I command you ...” “Leave ...” that describes something as absolutely necessary, urgent, or mandatory; something that is essential, extremely important, or urgent which demands immediate attention or action.

☞ vv. 17, 19, 20 & 21 “... *the alien, the fatherless and the widow* ...” This phrase is used 4X in this short text. A reference to those who have no power or social standing.

☞ v. 17 The message is simple: “Do not deprive ...” It is our **duty** as the people of God to care for and protect the vulnerable.

☞ vv. 18, 22 “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there.” This phrase is used 2X in this short text. Of all people, they should know what it is like to be an alien ... fatherless ... a widow ... dependent upon the **grace** of others with power and position.

☞ vv. 19, 20 & 21 The message is simple: “*When you are harvesting ... leave* (3X) *what remains* ...” As a person of God, you have the **resources** (however great or small) to care for and protect the vulnerable.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION ...

1. What actions, practices, or prayers help you turn away from status-seeking and grabbing for power?
2. What actions embody the humility of a child?
3. Who are the vulnerable people groups in your community and/or congregation? What acts of protection and care do they need?
4. “Protecting” the vulnerable from harm is an important step, but “caring” means working to make sure everyone has the opportunity to thrive. What steps can you or our congregation take to not just protect vulnerable populations, but also provide care?

NOTES ...

* “As a child, your happiness is in the hands of another.” Garrison Keillor: The concept that childhood happiness is in someone else's keeping is a recurring theme highlighting the vulnerability of children and the immense responsibility of parents and guardians.

† Commentary on Matthew 19:13-15, Rev. Dr. Brian Blount, courtesy Sanctified Art: “Tell Me Something Good” Sermon Planning Guide.

†† Michael Joseph Brown in True To Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary, edited by Brian K. Blount, Gay L. Byron, and Emerson B. Powery, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2024).

* Note: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) statement on Immigration: “Guided by our faith's call to welcome the stranger and belief in the inherent dignity of all people, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) actively advocates for and works toward more just immigration laws and processes.” (See their web page of resources, news and information at <https://pcusa.org/how-we-serve/global-engagement/immigration>)

* Note: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) statement on Children, Youth & Young Adults: “Young people offer unique gifts, perspectives, passions, and concerns that help build the church into the full expression of God’s love for the world. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) focuses on youth and young adults as leaders and offers opportunities for them as disciples, both locally and nationally.” (See their web page of resources, news and information at <https://pcusa.org/how-we-serve/churches-church-leaders/children-youth-young-adults>)