

The Blessing of the back packs

Gospel Matthew 18:1-11 (on screen)

Anyone who welcomes a little child like this one in my name welcomes me.

⁶ “What if someone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin? If they do, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and be drowned at the bottom of the sea.

The “little ones” are precious to Jesus.

Who is a “little one”?

Well Matthew, Mark, and Luke all use different Greek words to describe the little ones in the story – but the one thing in common Jesus held them in his arms – a little one is one you can pick up and hold – or sit on your knee.

The number one thing you want for your little ones is that they believe in Jesus and that they stay believing in Jesus all their life.

How do we teach them to believe??

We have to look at the student and go from there don't we teachers? How old is the kid?

What does the kid already know or not know?

What are the advantages and disadvantages the kid has?

Will the kid receive a bit of help or not.

The scriptures present us our student – a child from hell – a teacher's nightmare.

It says that there is no body, absolutely nobody, who wants to learn about Jesus by their self – on their own.

Believe me?

Romans 3 – it's terrible -

- Everyone is under the power of sin.
 - No one is right with God, no one at all.
 - No one understands.
 - No one trusts in God.
- No one does anything good, no one at all.
Everyone is full of curses and bitterness.

- Everyone is quick to draw blood.
- Everyone leaves a trail of harmful actions.
No one knows how to live in peace.
No one has any respect for God.

This is our starting point when it comes to teaching the faith – an enemy of God (Rom 5).

Most teachers have students who are ½ reasonable – and ½ willing to learn.

But when it comes to teaching people the faith we are fully unreasonable and completely unwilling to learn.

But faith can be taught – how is that?

Our favourite text Ephesians 2

You used to live as sinners when you followed the ways of this world. You served the one who rules over the spiritual forces of evil.

Once there was an evil spirit at work in you.

Once your desires were controlled by sin.

God was angry with us like he was with everyone else.

But even in God anger he loves us deeply. He is full of mercy. ⁵ So he gave us new life because of what Christ has done. He gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God's grace has saved us.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Twice Paul says our faith is God's gift to us. Faith is the work of the Holy Spirit.

And because of the gift of faith we can be turned from enemies of God to friends of God.

Ok so faith is a gift – we still need to receive a gift – how do we receive the gift of faith?

Back to Roman's chapter 10.

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Here is the promise that Faith comes from hearing about the love and sacrifice of Jesus.

Now we're back in normal teacher mode.

We can tell about Jesus and the Holy Spirit can break that heart of stone and create faith.

But there's a problem for normal teachers, for normal parents.

You see we wait until the child is of a proper teachable age – we won't get into an argument about how old that is.

Is it 3,4,5,6 years of age?

Today we find there is no age for a person to have faith.

Remember what Jesus said: "What if someone causes one of these 'little ones' who believe in me to sin?"

These "little ones" who believe in me.

How old are the little ones.

Let's go Greek.

Matthews uses the word "Mikron" – a very small child, a microscopic child.

Matthew also the word "Paideia" to describe these little ones.

Paideia is in the root word in paediatrics and orthopaedics it means "child and feet" – a toddler.

Marks also uses that word Paideia

But Luke – Luke the doctor, uses the word Brephair to describe little ones.

Now a Brephair is a baby in utero or newborn.

When Luke describes that meeting between pregnant Elizabeth and pregnant Mary he describes the babies in utero as Brephairs.

Luke says Brephairs, babies in utero can believe - If he didn't say it you would believe it.

Jesus says, "Whoever causes one of these toddlers, tiny ones, newborns, in euterus who believe in me, to sin, look out".

So back to teaching – we have faith as a gift to babies – so receiving faith doesn't require intellect.

(I suppose if you teach teenage boys that comes as no surprise)

We so often equate teaching with intellect – the more intellectual the more you can be taught.

Not so with faith – it requires no intellect only the Gospel of Jesus.

To teach faith we simply love as Jesus would – to any age – to any intellect.

I could have said that first - but there is a process we should know.

That's why we Lutherans can say confidently we have believers baptism in a baby – faith, according to Jesus, is in the tiniest, youngest babies, and we know faith is a gift not necessarily requiring any intellect.

It really is a nonsense that some denominations insist that their young adults make a decision for Jesus, for faith and baptism at some magical age where they can make an intellectual choice.

It's even more of a nonsense that they are expected to make an intellectual, rational choice about faith, a mysterious gift God.

Making a decision for Jesus, on you own, using your own brain and will, is unscriptural.

Mothers are on to this.

Mothers know there is a whole lot more to teaching than age and intellect as they somehow consciously or subconsciously instil their ways, their moods, their fears, their joys, their desires, to their baby in the womb.

Surely you have heard of of babies, in utero, dancing to mums' favourite music.

When Mary and Elizabeth met – what does it say?

Their babies, their brephairs, in utero, Jesus and John, “jumped for joy”.

Who told them? Who taught them to jump? Who introduced them?

Our kids are precious – I pray we can see that the gifting of faith is the work of the Holy Spirit in, with, and under the love of Jesus given by you and me, mum and dad.

Lord let us bless our kids with the love of Jesus that they may become your children, children of God. Amen.