

Shoo! Get out of here!

An Ordinary Time Sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton
Delivered on September 12, 2021 in the See All The People Series
My first sermon series in Geneva as Sr. Pastor

Mark 10:13-16 The Message

The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: “Don’t push these children away. Don’t ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless you accept God’s kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you’ll never get in.” Then, gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them.

Preamble

We’re continuing in our series that started back in Mark chapter 6 a few weeks ago when Jesus and his disciples were tired after some successful and fruitful ministry. Just as they were trying to catch a break a whole crowd of suffering people bombarded Jesus and his disciples. In their exhaustion, instead of retreating inward to their own pain and weariness, they looked upon the crowd with compassion. That wave of compassion propelled Jesus and his disciples into more ministry with the crowd and beyond. Pastor Lisa and I have followed Jesus as he has looked with compassion at those we might be compelled to dismiss, forget or pretend not to see given our energy levels. We’ve seen the the woman and the well and her whole community and been called to look into our own families and neighborhoods. We’ve looked Syrophoenician woman and how Jesus stepped out of bounds to see and act with compassion towards her and how we are called to do the same with people that might be out of bounds for us. And today, its fitting that as we launch our children’s and youth ministry that Mark’s gospel now in chapter 10 has Jesus focusing on children.

Let’s dig in to what this text might be stirring with us to help us see more people and act with compassion just as Jesus shows us, by pausing here for prayer. Please pray with me:

Prayer of Illumination

Speak to us Holy Spirit. Speak to my heart as I share the message you’ve inspired me to speak. Speak to our hearts and minds that you might stir within us to faithful action. Speak to us in what ever ways we need to be discomfited or calmed to best be open to your movement today. Amen.

Sermon

When this passage took place some two thousand years ago did you think that Jesus was aware of the statistic¹ that 1 of 10 school-age children lack a single trusted non-parent adult in their lives that they can share their worries with? In our community that's over 550 school-age kids without a mentor, teacher, coach, other family member, healthcare provider that loves that isn't a parent. I wonder if its these kids, the 10 percent who need just one trusted adult that were coming to Jesus in today's passage?

It makes me wonder, when the disciples were shooing kids like Sam away did Jesus know that

kids like Sam, are 2.2x more likely to engage in risky behaviors than her peers who have a trusted non-parent adult in their lives. Kids like Sam are 1.9x more likely to not use a method to prevent STI's and pregnancy, 3x more likely to experience depression and have

Meet Sam.

She is **1 out of every 10** adolescents who aren't able to identify a trusted adult in their lives.

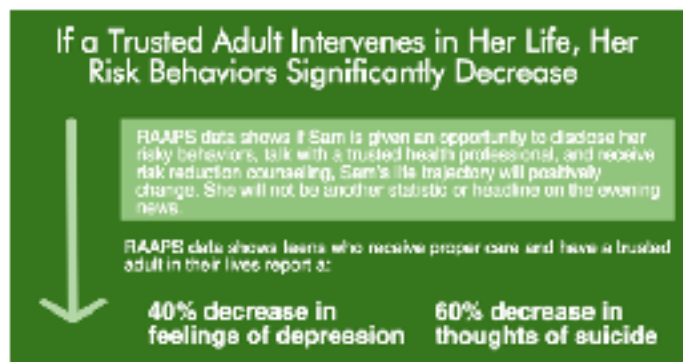


What Does This Mean for Sam?

She is **2.2X** more likely to engage in risk behaviors than her peers who have a trusted adult in their life.

thoughts of self-harm and suicide.

Is that why Jesus was irate with his disciples and told them so, because if the disciples could really see what happens in lives of kids like Sam, then they'd know that if they'd have been filled with compassion and tried to develop a relationship with these kids and hopefully become that trusted adult. If the disciples were successful in forming relationships, then the kids who were coming to Jesus, 40% of the them would have a decrease in feelings of depression and 60% would experience decrease in thoughts of suicide.



¹ <https://drjennifersalerno.com/the-impact-of-a-positive-adult-influence-on-our-youth/>

I look at our own church. In your bulletins, I've listed the names of the children currently under the care of our church. There are 75 names here that we are bound to by baptismal vow or program connections. How many these names are like Sam? The statical 10% or 9 kids? or maybe its 17? or 3...? To our Sam's

Brooke	Adam	Zoey	Brock	Spencer
Keegan	Gretchen	Cameron	Jaxon	Ethan
Quinn	Jaclyn	Emeric	Sam	Jack
Evie	Mackenzie	Kormac	A.J.	Lincoln
Joshua	Cameron	Mason	Leah	Harper
Emily	Boyd	Wyatt	Melanie	Lucas
Olivia	Bramlett	Joshua	Charlie	Daniel
Rachel	Elise	Nathan	Eli	Elise
Drew	Elliot	Collin	Kay	Molly
Grant	Wace	Scphie	Rita	Maggie
Julianna	Ethan	Clay	Ruthie	Carter
Anderson	Lily	Mason	Brandon	Landon
Gia	Ella	Keely	Chloe	Jimmy
Liam	Austin	Lily	Abigail	Gracie
Caroline	Amelia	Ava	Addie	Hannah

and all our kids, are we like the disciples or Jesus? At UMCG by my quick count we dedicate 10.36% of our dollars to kids and I don't know how to count volunteer hours at this point for children's ministry in relation to the total volunteer hours generated at UMCG. But we can self-evaluate decided where we fall on the sho-err of children to embracer of children spectrum that the gospel of Mark presents us today. I don't yet know, if we are the kind of church that wants children around just when it is convenient for us and the kids don't happen to impede our social and spiritual needs and kindly give them a spot at the kid's table or if we've discovered with Jesus why children are so important to the spiritual lives of adults and to the overall health and life of the church.

Oh, did you catch, what Jesus said? Did you hear why Jesus said children are so important? Jesus said in The Message translation "children are at the very center of life in the kingdom." In our more familiar New Revised Standard Version, Jesus says "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." The reason Jesus provides for children being so important is that they have hold of the kingdom of God. Children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Children

have what we have lost as adults and either so desperately want back or they have what we as adult work hard denying that we need.

Children -before they are forced to grow up because of suffering and sin- know justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God and neighbor. Children are open, adaptable, resilient, curious, generous, loving, until the world teaches them otherwise. I'll admit some children from the very day they are born, have the kingdom of God is pulled away from them, yet some still have it and they teach the rest of us how to enter the kingdom of God again.

If its right that children have the kingdom (and Jesus hasn't steered me wrong yet) and we actually believe that kids are at the center of kingdom life as Jesus tells us then Julie and Denise - our program staff for school-age kids- would never have to ask for a volunteer to help with children and youth ministry, unless we adults so far from the kingdom ourselves that we might feel exposed if the kids show us the kingdom Jesus claims they have...

Once of the most influential moments in my faith formation happened over the course of the summer at the end of my freshmen year at college. I was recruited to spend the summer teaching VBS at churches all across northern Illinois. I was a religious studies student. I was active in my church growing up. I had the head knowledge about the Bible and God. I had solid of experience doing church work and had already decided to be a pastor. But that summer spent with hundred of kids testing my patience, drawing me picture, playing games, crawling all over me and giving me colds taught me something I could have never learned any other way, the full wideness and depth of God's love and grace. Those kids loved on me like Jesus does and when I started that summer I thought I knew God's grace, but by the end my life was truly reflecting God's grace, because they had the kingdom of God. It belonged to them and they shared it with me until I got the kingdom back myself.

Myrtle Felkner, a good old Methodist in Iowa knows that Jesus is right about children being at the center of the kingdom and that it belongs to them. She shares many of her lifetime experiences with the kingdom and children in her lovely little memoir titled "I Knew Them All by Heart. A legacy of a Sunday School Teacher".

In the story she tells about Lydia, Ms. Myrtle tells the story of how one girl had such a hold of the kingdom it saved a whole church. Let me share a shortened version of Lydia's story with you. "She was only seven years old when her aunt June invited her to Sunday school. It didn't

Myrtle Felkner
April 14, 1925 - Sept 25, 2016



occur to her to wonder why she was the only child there, nor that there were only eight people in worship that morning. She just knew she liked it. A nice teacher showed her where the children had Sunday school. She loved hearing the Bible story and quickly learned the memory verse, colored a picture, and began a project with her teacher. Lydia didn't know it, and neither did that small congregation, but that day began along and enduring love affair between Lydia and her church. Lydia, now an active young woman in high school and Church says, "I am where I am today because of that Sunday school." The folks at Lydia's church add, "the church is what it is today because of Lydia!"

You see, Lydia thought the whole experience of Sunday school was so great that she kept asking her friends to go with her. At first, it was only one or two. Then she asked a family with six children, all of them agreed that Sunday school was, indeed, a fine thing to do on a Sunday. The kids learned that Jesus loves them. Lydia says 'the people [at church] made us feel special.'

[Then there is] the story of Lydia's first Easter in the church. When her older sister suggested the family celebrate Easter by going to the grandmother's church. Lydia told her family 'you can go to grandmother's church, but I'm going to my church'. [With that,] all of Lydia's family all went with [her] to *her* church, Where everyone was made to feel special and loved on this Christian holiday. Lydia's sisters and parents said they would join Lydia and her aunt June in becoming active committee members of Lydia's small congregation. By the next Easter morning, Lydia invited almost all her whole extended family to join her. There were 80 people in church that morning the most congregation has seen in decades. Baptism, confirmation classes, and adult professions of faith began happen regularly. Of course this all requires some changes, but Lydia kept inviting. She greeted people the door. Gave out him books and bulletins. She loved the Christmas programs and youth group and she loved to help with worship. Once Lydia let the whole worship service by herself. An awesome day and Lydia's life." By the age of 12, Lydia's congregation nominated her as the Conference Youth Evangelist and easily won the award. One would think Lydia might be pastor some day. Instead she grew up pursuing her desire to be an orthodontist.

But you know what Lydia's church realized and what Lydia helped them realize. That children are at the center of the kingdom of God. That children have what most all of us adults need in our spiritual lives - a secure spot in the kingdom of God. And so those 8 tired church members put Lydia at the center of their struggling little church and the kingdom start to bloom in what was once considered depleted soil.

There are 75 children in your bulletin. There are children in your life some you may not see, they all have a place at the center of God's kingdom. To children belongs the kingdom.

This week, let's be like Jesus and find a way to get closer to the kingdoms by embracing and blessing the children Jesus is calling us to see. If we don't know the way to embrace and bless them, ask... the kids will show us. Amen.

Brooke	Adam	Zoey	Brock	Spencer
Keegan	Gretchen	Cameron	Jaxon	Ethan
Quinn	Jaclyn	Emeric	Sam	Jack
Evie	Mackenzie	Kormac	A.J.	Lincoln
Joshua	Cameron	Mason	Leah	Harper
Emily	Boyd	Wyatt	Melanie	Lucas
Olivia	Bramlett	Joshua	Charlie	Daniel
Rachel	Elise	Nathan	Eli	Elise
Drew	Elliot	Collin	Kay	Molly
Grant	Wace	Scphie	Rita	Maggie
Julianna	Ethan	Clay	Ruthie	Carter
Anderson	Lily	Mason	Brandon	Landon
Gia	Ella	Keely	Chloe	Jimmy
Liam	Austin	Lily	Abigail	Gracie
Caroline	Amelia	Ava	Addie	Hannah