

Good News: Protection and Care for the Vulnerable

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Matthew 19:13-15 Deuteronomy 24:17-22
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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There is something about today's Gospel reading that often feels warm and sentimental to us. We picture a scene that might belong in a children's Bible storybook: little children gathered around Jesus, climbing into his lap, smiling as he places his hands on their heads in blessing. It feels sweet and comforting. But in the world of Jesus, this moment was anything but sentimental. In fact, it was disruptive.

In the first-century world, children were not regarded the way we often see them today. They were not the center of family life or the focus of public attention. Children had little social status. They had no power, no authority, and very little value in the public sphere. They were vulnerable, dependent, and easily overlooked. So when people begin bringing children to Jesus, the disciples respond the way most people of their time would have. They try to stop it. "Don't bother him," they say. "Send them away." To the disciples, Jesus' time is too valuable for this. His work is too important. Surely there are more significant people for him to meet with—leaders, scholars, influential figures.

But Jesus does something that he does again and again throughout the Gospel. He reorients the entire social order. He says, "**Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them.**" And then he blesses them. In that moment, **Jesus centers those who society has pushed to the margins.** He elevates those considered least important. He reminds everyone present that the kin-dom of God does not operate according to the same hierarchies that govern the world. **The kin-dom of God begins with the vulnerable.**

In doing so, Jesus is not inventing a new idea. He is standing firmly within a long tradition of justice that runs throughout the Hebrew scriptures. We hear it clearly in our reading from **Deuteronomy**. There, God gives instructions to the people of Israel about how they are to structure their community. And again and again the same concern appears: care for those who are vulnerable. "**Do not deprive the immigrant or the orphan of justice.** Do not take a widow's garment in pledge." "When you harvest your fields, leave some behind for the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow." "When you beat your olive trees or gather grapes from your vineyard, do not strip them bare. Leave some for those who have little."

This practice—called **gleaning**—was written directly into the economic life of the community. Farmers were commanded not to harvest every last bit of their crops. They were to intentionally leave some behind so that those without land, without income, without protection could gather food for themselves. It was a form of **social safety net**

long before that language existed. But it was also something more than charity. It preserved dignity.

Those who gleaned were not passive recipients of generosity; they were active participants in sustaining their own lives. The law created space for survival and for agency at the same time. And the reason for this command appears again and again in Deuteronomy: *“Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt.”* **Remember where you came from.** Remember what vulnerability felt like. Remember what it meant to live without power, without protection, without security. **Your memory of oppression should shape your compassion.**

In other words, **the people of God are called to care for the vulnerable not out of charity alone, but out of solidarity. Because at some point, every one of us has been vulnerable.** And that is where Jesus' blessing of the children becomes deeply powerful. Jesus reminds us of something we often forget: every single one of us began life in vulnerability. Every one of us was once small and dependent. Every one of us relied on the care and protection of others to survive. None of us entered the world powerful or self-sufficient. We were carried. We were fed. We were protected. We were nurtured.

Our lives began in vulnerability. And Jesus' gesture toward those children is a reminder of that shared human truth. When he welcomes the children, he is saying something profound about the nature of God's kin-dom: **the measure of a faithful community is not how it treats the powerful—but how it treats the vulnerable.** Throughout his ministry, Jesus consistently centers what he calls *“the last, the least, and the lost.”* The poor. The sick. The outsider. The immigrant. The widow. The orphan. The child.

Those whom society often overlooks or dismisses are precisely those whom God draws near. And this is where the Gospel begins to move from a comforting story into a challenging call. Because the question for us is not simply whether Jesus welcomed children. The question is whether we are building communities that reflect that same welcome.

If we are truly living out the good news of the Gospel, then **vulnerability should never be met with neglect or indifference. Instead, it should be met with care.** And not just care that protects people from harm—but care that helps them thrive. That is what Deuteronomy envisioned when it instructed farmers to leave grain in the fields. It wasn't simply about preventing starvation. It was about ensuring that everyone had access to the means of life. It was about structuring society so that the most vulnerable would not be forgotten. It was about building a community where survival did not depend on power or privilege.

Today, we might ask: who are the vulnerable in our world? They are still with us. Children living in poverty. Families struggling to find stable housing. Immigrants and refugees seeking safety and opportunity. The transgender. The elderly who live in isolation. Those whose voices are ignored because they lack power or influence. The names may change, but the call of scripture remains the same. Remember who you were. Remember your shared humanity. Remember that compassion is not optional in the kin-dom of God—it is foundational.

And the beautiful thing about the church, when it is at its best, is that it can become exactly the kind of community that scripture imagines. A community where no one is invisible. A community where resources are shared. A community where children are cherished. A community where the vulnerable are not pushed aside but placed at the center. A community where care is not just a feeling, but a practice.

This is what Jesus models when he stops everything to bless those children. In a world that values productivity, status, and importance, Jesus pauses to say: *These are the ones who matter*. The kin-dom of God belongs not to the powerful but to those who depend on grace, compassion, and community. And those who follow Jesus are called to shape a world that reflects that truth.

So perhaps the invitation for us today is simply this: To look around with new eyes. To notice those who are often overlooked. To listen to voices that are often unheard. And to **build lives and communities where vulnerability is not ignored but embraced with compassion**. Because when we do that, we begin to glimpse what Jesus calls the kingdom of heaven. A kin-dom where the last are first. Where the least are honored. Where the lost are found. And where even the smallest child is welcomed with open arms.

May we be the kind of people—and the kind of church—that makes that kin-dom visible in the world.

Amen.

Resources:

A Sanctified Art, Lent 2026

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