

4<sup>th</sup> July 2021

## Baby Blessing and Holy Communion

### Scripture Sentences

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever.  
Psalm 106.1

### Opening Prayer

Sovereign God, giver of life, creator of all that is and has been, sustainer of the universe we praise you. Living God, giver of joy, of the blessings we receive each day and of the love we share together, we praise you. Gracious ~God giver of mercy, always forgiving, constantly bringing renewal and restoration, we praise you. Faithful God, giver of guidance, forever by our side, instructing, leading, challenging, equipping, we praise you. Generous God, we thank you for providing, nurturing, nourishing, and fulfilling our needs. We come this day trusting in your mercy and assured of your guidance. We come in celebration to offer our worship and thanks and to commit ourselves and this child to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Bible Readings      Psalm 139.1-6, 13-16, 23, 24

*O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. . . such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it... For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed...*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any hurtful way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*

and Mark 10:13-16

*People were bringing little children to Jesus in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, '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.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.*

## Reflection

What kind of world do we want our children and grandchildren to live in?

Jesus' followers thought that the Messiah or Saviour to come was going to make their society a better place, to rescue them out from under the occupation of mighty Rome. But Jesus came not just to restore the people of Israel to their former glory under king David, but to change the whole world.

Jesus teaches his followers that society can be transformed only from the bottom up. In the previous chapter, (Mark 9:36) when Jesus' disciples were arguing who would be the greatest when he came to power, Jesus lifts a child in order to teach them a different way. Children, in the ancient world had no social status. He says, 'whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.' Jesus is saying that the people of God, the Church, is to be different from the world: it is not to be a power base for its members but a community where those who are excluded or oppressed or devalued in society are welcomed and included and given value and respect.

When the ancient people of God, the Israelites, escaped slavery in Egypt, they took their children with them (cf. Exodus 10:9). When they gathered for worship, it was not an 'adults only' preserve, but an opportunity for ALL to learn (cf. Deuteronomy 31:12-13). When they held their religious festivals, children were included such as with the Passover Seder meal. In fact, it is written into the ceremony that a child comes and asks why they celebrate the festival, a description is given, and the child actively participates in the service, looking for and finding a matzo in a folded napkin.

This is the way the Church as the group of followers of Christ today is to be. Children and all those with lower social standing in society, those who are outcasts, on the edges of society are to be welcomed; those who are dominated by others and victimized by patterns of hierarchy are to be raised up and recognised as equals. People are to be appointed to posts not because of social standing in society, but because of skills and gifts.

One of the reasons that I am proud to be United Reformed Church is that we are not hierarchical in that all ministers are paid equal men and women, local ministers are equal in status to those in positions of wider responsibility; decisions are made in councils at the local level as well as at the wider synod and national level and all people may have input into these decisions.

In today's passage Jesus affirms the value of children again. The disciples were forbidding people who were bring little children to Jesus for him to bless them. (Mark 10:13) Jesus was indignant. Sometimes people do have the assumption that Church is not for children and that they should be kept apart, or to sit still, be quiet and not interrupt. However, the Scriptures NEVER exclude children: indeed, the contrary is true.

We read later that the apostle Peter says, 'the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call' (Acts 2:39).

Jesus teaches his followers: Firstly, he says that children are not to be excluded but welcomed for it is to 'such as these', that is 'people like them', that the kingdom of God belongs.' So, what are children like? In the past you may have heard sweet and sentimental descriptions of children, that the kingdom belongs to them because children are innocent and trusting. Yes, they may be, however at other times children can be difficult and selfish and mean to others. The more likely reason Jesus identified them as the ones belonging to God's realm is because they were lowly. In first-century Palestine they represented the most powerless class. Children were the least of the least in the social order, with neither status nor rights. Today in our society they may have greater rights, but they are still vulnerable and need to be protected and cared for as they learn how-to live-in society.

In the church they rightly are to be given opportunity to be taught about Jesus and his ways of justice and love, and they should be fully welcomed and included in our worship and church life. This may mean that at times they are noisy and make us become childlike as we include things that they can join in and begin to understand. Another reason that I am glad to be a part of the URC is that we may included children in our worship and celebration of festivals. We may teach and include them in our special service of Holy Communion.

Secondly, Jesus teaches that all of us are to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. So how are we to receive God's way of life to be our way of life? Jesus is not necessarily asking us to become naive or simplistic. To become like a child is to acknowledge the place and condition of the most vulnerable ones in our midst – our children. This means not to misuse our greater knowledge and strength to in any way harm or hinder them, but in order to enable them to flourish.

One of the parts of this service today is for the parents to dedicate themselves to the high calling of parenthood. All of us are given the opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the challenge of passing on God's blessing of children so that they may have the best life that they can and become all that God intends for them. Let it be so. AMEN.