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“Grape Mustaches”

Mark 10:2-16

Why would Mark place this passage about divorce next to Jesus welcoming the little children? Listen to what he says, “The kingdom of God is like wearing a grape Kool-Aid mustache.” Okay I caught you. No, it doesn’t say that *exactly*. But he declares that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these—little children. Perhaps this has some instruction for marriage. Both of these passages are about relationships, and it’s the children that show us the way.

Think about it. Children are captivated by pure wonder. At their smallest they delight more in ceiling fans and lights than in the toys you give them—movement and sound are amazing to them. As children get a little older they’re still caught up in wonder. The gift children have is an amazing ability to live in the present. They are able to take in the present for all that it is—pregnant with meaning. They don’t miss it for wondering about the future, their 401K or budget balance. For the most part, children don’t carry the anxieties that we do. They’re not thinking about how much money is in the bank, the life insurance policy, if there are enough groceries in the house, or bills to pay—these are responsibilities that children don’t wrestle with.

Kids just don’t worry the same way. They don’t worry about germs the way we do. Playing in the dirt is fun, worms are fascinating, writhing things, and mud pies are almost edible creations. Walking around bare foot, children don’t worry what they’re feet are exposed to. Kids just run around, sometimes tongue even out. I used to ask my mom, “Why don’t you run?” And then we got a trampoline, and she refused to jump on it with me. I just didn’t understand. There’s one message that this sends to children—parents or adults—don’t play any more. We have forgotten how to play.

Nowadays, some of the greatest therapy advancements with children have been with “play therapy.” Perhaps, we could learn a thing or two in our marriages from our relationships with children.

For example, remember what it was like to live an imaginative world? The line between reality and this imaginative world was very thin (like dream space). Children believe anything is possible here. You can ride a dragonfly, not saying “height restrictions and gravitational force make this feat impossible.” It just happens. Boys can wear dresses or capes, girls wear princess outfits (mostly these days) and even to the store. Who cares? Children can make forts out of couch pillows, sheets, and cardboard, and it’s the greatest delight. Anything is possible. It’s no wonder that believing in God comes very naturally for children.

The poem “Summer Prayer” helps us remember what it was like to be a kid:

Because I’ve caught crayfish in August in the creek by the railroad tracks,/And because I’ve lolled in a hammock after lunch, reading Aquaman comic books,/Waiting a full hour before returning to the backyard pool,/And because I’ve chased grasshoppers by day and fireflies by night,/Watched a zillion stars light up a blackened sky,/And tasted the sweetness of a root-beer float on a country highway after dark,/And because I’ve heard scary stories told, and told a few as well,/And walked a wooded path with friends I knew were pals for keeps,/And built a clubhouse and played red rover,/Swung on a rope to splash in a slow brown river,/Rolled down dunes and watched a turtle doze in dappled sunlight—/My heart may know why Jesus said you must be like a kid before you enter the kingdom of heaven.¹

These children show us the way to the kingdom. We already know it’s an upside down kingdom, where the last are first, and power is different. Think of how powerful children feel though, not for being large and in charge, but for being small. They relish that they are the only ones who can fit through that window to unlock the front door or retrieve the lost item with their small hand.

And children show us the kingdom because they are not afraid of people they don’t know, in fact so much so, that we have to teach them not to talk to strangers, which may be more damaging than good. Maybe we should talk more to strangers. They don’t notice differences the same way we do, sizing people up based on color, dress, appearance in general. They don’t care about how much money you have.

Maybe most importantly why children show us the kingdom is that children are extremely honest and open about their feelings. They lack cynicism. They trust that people will treat them well. They don’t anticipate betrayal, and they definitely don’t hold on to guilt. If they do something wrong, they don’t condemn themselves, they get over it. We could learn a lot from this very attribute. God’s teaching us, like little children, we should trust that when we confess our sin, we need to get over it too, stop living in the guilt. Children just get right up, brush it off and trust that they will be loved again. Maybe that’s why Mark places this text about divorce next to the kingdom being like children. Perhaps, we married people need to start acting more like children—oh yeah, children get ugly, but for like two seconds, and then they’re playing together after five. We need to learn to forgive and forget easily, and love openly and honestly, trusting all the while.

Children show us the way of the kingdom. No wonder Jesus rebuked the disciples for holding back the children. These are the kingdom. They do show us the way. Jesus made a point of that clearly. “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Ultimately, this is what communion reminds us of, that we are all children of God—(there’s that language again—children), *dependents*, ready to play and engage with our whole hearts. That’s what

¹ Tom McGrath, *Raising Faith-Filled Kids*

communion should be—the deepest celebration that we have been made children of God by Jesus Christ. We are heirs to the throne—we are princes and princesses. Maybe we weren't that far off as children playing dress-up. We come around this table and we should take a deep gulp of grape juice. Like, children we should come without shame; they would drink it in and with gusto, mustache and all. It's so good, they don't try to drink carefully or dignified, slurping may even be involved. In a few moments, you will take the cup and drink. They're in Dixie cups to remind us that we must come to the table as children, and hey, I dare you to get a grape mustache.

We join the rest of the world today acknowledging that it's not just us who have the corner on the kingdom, but once again we are ALL God's children, we're Providence children in Hendersonville, NC, and we celebrate with children in Georgia and North Dakota and California and Mexico and Bulgaria and Germany and Singapore and Nigeria and New Zealand. We're all God's children. Let's celebrate that we have a Heavenly Parent, Abba, that loves us beyond belief, invites us to play, be honest, be present, and then let's go show and tell. Amen.