

LENT 4

Blessing the Children

Read Mark 10:13-16.

What picture came to mind for you as you read this week's scripture? Maybe neatly dressed children and babies, carried by their parents coming to get a pat on the head from the famous rabbi? We've all seen those on church walls and Sunday School papers. But let's dig a little deeper and see what Mark may be revealing.

In Jewish culture, the father would be the one to bring a child to the rabbi, as we saw with Jairus. But the text does not say "fathers" or "parents," only "people"—"they." And why were they bringing them in order for Jesus to touch them?

Haptomai is a Greek word for "healing touch" that comes up many times in Mark. Think about the woman who touched his robe, or when Jesus touched a leper or blind man. Those who wanted a touch need healing!

Now, let's consider who these children might be: Sick children? Poor street children brought by people of the community? Orphans with no father to present them?

The disciples had previously sent them away because everyone saw them as a nuisance—a problem—as "less than." But Jesus sees them as the very ones his kingdom belongs to! Seeing them deprived of love and care makes Jesus ANGRY!

Clearly, this story shows it is a priority value of God's kingdom and heart that we DON'T TURN AWAY but rather SEE the suffering children in our world!

Zoe participants often say they were seen as a nuisance in their communities and often stigmatized and isolated, even mistreated and cheated.

Let's go to Rwanda and meet Joseph. Perhaps he gives a new picture of what the children coming to Jesus may have looked like.

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Jesus first SEES the children. Then he draws them into community, saying "Let the children come to me." He models for his disciples and us the healing power of welcome, love, and touch. His approach to these "problem" children is holistic and includes their need for loving relationships, health, and community. He recognizes their value in God's kingdom!

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We also see God's kingdom in humbling ways through the Zoe participants. Once they are welcomed with God's love, they work hard, begin to share whatever they have and often train or hire other children and adopt other orphans.

Let's visit **Bosco in Rwanda** and see how his life has changed.

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At the end of this Bible story is the beautiful image of Jesus reaching down and lifting up the children, laying healing hands on them and blessing them.

Modeled after Jesus' actions, Zoe Empowers reaches out to the least, searching villages and town for the most vulnerable children with no one to care for them, and lifts them up.

Zoe staff invite them to join community empowerment groups to learn skills, heal and restore their dignity and self-worth, and share their dreams. This child-centered approach blesses them with a hope-filled future.

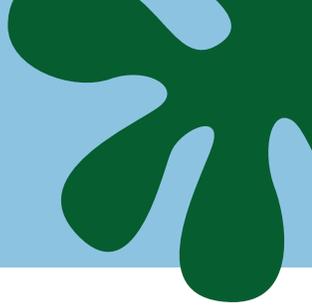
Let's visit **Vimbai in Zimbabwe** and see how tailoring skills and a Zoe mentor are changing their lives.

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In Mark 10:16, Jesus finally "blesses" the children- the only time in Mark where it says Jesus "blesses" someone. In Hebrew scriptures we have seen many times how the Jewish father blesses the eldest son in the family, bestowing honor and a good future. Jesus' blessing these poor children is remarkable, and shows them they have a Father in Heaven who loves them.

Did you notice that the Zoe young people always pray for God's blessings for those who have helped them? They are truly thankful and want to pass on their blessings. Through Zoe, they, too, come to know they are blessed and loved by God!

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Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. What thoughts do you have about this scripture story?
2. What did you notice or wonder about in the videos? How do their stories connect with the biblical text?
3. Where are you or your church involved in seeing and blessing children?

Prayer

Lord, as we walk with you through Lent, we want to be more like you. Help us to open our hearts and eyes to see the vulnerable children in our community and world, and open our hands to lift them up with generosity and love. In your name, Amen.

Action

Add a gift or IOU to your Zoe Lenten Offering in thanksgiving for each child in your family, each grandchild and/or each child in your church family. Know that your gift will transform and bless a child! Speak a word of blessing to a child in your own life today!