

Sermon for Sunday, February 11, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"THE BOY WHO WANTED TO DIE"

St. Mark 10:13-16

Text: "And they were bringing the children to him, that he might touch them."
St. Mark 10:13a

In many ways this has been a very thoughtful week for me. Two of my dear friends in this congregation had been near death, one dying Thursday and the other Friday. On top of that, the flowers this morning are given in memory of one of our great Elders, Bob McDonald, and tomorrow will be the anniversary of the death of another of our great Elders, Ed Clark. I got to thinking this week about the number of Elders who have died since I came to be pastor here back in August of 1970. The first was Gil Trimble and then Elder Woolwine, both in 1972. In 1973 we lost John Raeburn Green and in 1974 Syd Studt. In 1975 we lost four Elders, J.E. Williams, Elmer Hibert, Stu White, and right before Christmas that year, Bob McDonald. In 1976 we lost Rolla Millure and then in 1977 we lost Jim Hickok--whose wife Florence will be buried tomorrow afternoon at one here in the sanctuary. Then, in 1978 we lost Ed Clark and Ben McMillan.

These were all men who loved the Lord and loved Central Presbyterian Church. Working with those men has been one of the greatest privileges of my life. Two thoughts have run through my mind as I have remembered these leaders of our congregation. First, I have been reminded of how fragile life is, and of how brief it is. The Bible speaks of life and compares it to the grass of the field. In the morning the grass flourishes, but in the evening it is cut down and withers. "So teach us to number our days," cries the Psalmist, "that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. And let the beauty of the Lord, our God, be upon us..." Do you remember how Longfellow put it? He wrote, "Art is long and time is fleeting, And our hearts, though stout and brave, Still, like muffled drums, are beating Funeral marches to the grave."

Yes, life is fragile and brief. And when it is so quickly over, the only thing that will really matter is what our relationship to Jesus has been. Before this new year is out perhaps another Elder, another member, or even I myself will have met that last Great Enemy, Death. But thanks be to God who has given us the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray for you as I do myself that when the time comes for both of us, that we will be ready; that we will have so lived our lives that Jesus will say to us, "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

But the second thought that has been running through my mind is what these men have meant in the life of this congregation. I think most of us are aware of the exciting things going on at Central. We have experienced a dynamic growth and there are so many exciting ministries going on where lives are being touched for Jesus. How did this come about? How is it possible that such a ministry has developed. Well, there are a lot of factors, but one of them that looms largest is the foundation that was laid. Those men of God, along with the other Elders, gave a spiritual leadership that laid a solid and firm foundation on Jesus. And today we are able to build because there is a foundation that does not fail us. Like the parable Jesus told about the house built on the sand and the house built on the rock, those men laid a foundation of pure rock of which Jesus was the cornerstone.

And that brings me to the subject that I really want to talk about this morning, which is building for the future. In our Scripture for this morning we read that "they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them..." As we think about the future and what it will be like, I pray that it will be a future where there

are men and women who as little children were touched by Jesus. As I look at our world, I see a lot to cause dismay. On the international scene we see a lot of turmoil and discord. Iran is on the verge of civil war, Ethiopia has been engaged in savage fighting, Cambodia has been on the verge of genocide, and Idi Amin is only one small part of the trouble in Africa where Rhodesia and South Africa have seen murder and terrorism. On the home front we see incredible corruption and graft by policemen, by city and government officials; we see rising divorce rates, violent crime that keeps rising, and a proliferation of obscenity and vulgarity. What will the future of the world, of our country, of our city be if it does not have brave men and women who as children had their lives touched by Jesus?

Who will bring the children to Jesus? It concerns me that many of the children and youth of our congregation are not being brought to Sunday School to be exposed to Christian teachers and Christian teaching, and the study of the Bible. If I felt the Bible and Christian principles were being truly taught in the home, it would not be such a concern, but down deep, I am not convinced that is the case. Yes, who will bring the children to Jesus?

And what about the children in your neighborhood? There are so many parents today who do not have any religious commitments and who are not related to a church. What about their children? Is there no one who will care, no one who will go to the trouble and effort to try to bring those children to Jesus? Oh, who will bring the children--who will love them enough to care?

Last year I read a story in Campus Life magazine and the last week I saw it reprinted in the Presbyterian Journal. Let me share that story with you. A young Christian man had gone across the street to a neighbors house where they were having a barbecue party. The author writes, "Halfway through my second chunk of ribs, I felt a tug on my sleeve. I looked down into the face of a four-year-old girl. She wore a little leopard skin bikini and leaned against the picnic bench without saying a word. But her eyes pleaded as she raised her arms in a 'lift-me-up' motion. I had barbecue sauce all over my hands and face, so I shook my head. 'Not now, I'm eating.' She turned to my friend sitting next to me, pulled at his shirt and made the same motion to be picked up and held. When he shook his head she moved on to the next person, and the next, around the picnic tables...no one picked her up...then she left. (Suddenly a guy dashed out and dived into the pool). "When he surfaced moments later, he held a limp body in his arms." The author went on to tell how they tried to revive the child, but by the time the fire department came, it was too late. He goes on to tell how the little girl was living nearby with her unmarried mother. The man living with her promised to marry the mother if she would get rid of the little girl. So, the mother had actually walked the streets of downtown San Diego, stopping strangers and saying, "do you want a baby, will you take this little girl?" He also learned that the little girl had almost drowned four times in the past two months. One day she accidentally fell in the pool and learned it was an effective way to get some instant love and attention. Someone had pulled her out--everyone had gathered around to hold and comfort her. So, over the next few weeks, three more times she tried that trick to get attention and it always worked. Then came the day when 18 adults were so busy eating they didn't have time for her. When nobody picked her up, when no one offered to hold her or talk to her, she tried the only solution she knew. She walked out to the pool, jumped in to wait...and drowned.

Oh, who will care--who will bring the children to the love of Jesus? Not all little children are as obvious in their plea for love and attention, but there are so many who are desperate to know somebody cares and somebody loves them. And maybe they don't throw themselves in a backyard pool, but they cast themselves into drugs, into sex, into anything that will offer them some relief, some feeling of

being cared for. And while it may work for a little while in the end their solution ends up drowning them and destroying them.

Yes, who will bring the children? Who will love them enough to care to bring them to Jesus that he might touch them?

But notice what the disciples did when the people brought the children. The Bible says, "...and the disciples rebuked them." I suppose they thought Jesus couldn't be bothered with a little boy or a little girl. You know, we have a lot of evangelism programs going on here in the church. Most of them are for adults, a few for the youth. But who will bring the children? We have built lovely new educational facilities and we ought to overflow them with the little ones. We rebuke the children when we don't care and don't reach out. But there are other ways to rebuke a child--we can have too few teachers--we can have poorly equipped teachers--we can rebuke them in so many ways. But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them."

The third thing I would call to your attention is the last verse of our scripture for this morning. The Bible says, "And he(Jesus) took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them." That's what Jesus wants to do for the children of this city and the children in your neighborhood--to take them in his arms and bless them.

In the Presbyterian Journal, I read a story the other day that has simply haunted me. The article was entitled, "Daddy, I don't want to live anymore." Those were the seven words spoken by a five-year-old boy to a man who wasn't really his daddy, a thirty-two-year-old man who had beaten the little boy continually for three weeks. Once, after the man had beaten him and actually stomped him in the stomach, the little boy looked up at him with pain in his face and loneliness in his eyes. "Daddy," he said, "I don't want to live any more." "Well," said the man, "then why don't you just die?" "All right," said the child, "I will." And so he did. He just died. As simply as he said he would, he died. I've tried to get those words out of my mind, but they won't go away. I realize there is a lot of child abuse in the world--right here in our own city--where helpless little human beings are beaten and crippled, cut off from love and exposed only to hate and cruelty.

But I also thought of my own children and how much I love them. Yet, have I given them the best--have I given them Jesus? You see, there will be many cruel things that will come into their lives. There will be pain and hurt, there will be disease, there will be times of failure, there will be times when a precious relationship is broken. There will be times then they feel isolated and lonely. How will they be able to endure the hurt of it? Will they be so ill-equipped for life that out of their pain and hurt they will say, "Daddy, I don't want to live anymore?"

You see, there are many ways to abuse a child. And, in the long run, perhaps the worst way of all is to deny him a relationship to Jesus. The Bible says that Jesus took the little children in his arms and blessed them.

Well, here at Central we have a great opportunity to touch the lives of children for Jesus. Our Elders, our spiritual leaders, laid a foundation for us that we can minister today. We need equipment, we need materials, we need people who are willing to teach. But we also need people who care enough to bring the children to Jesus. There are two things I pray for about the future. First, I pray it will have in it brave men and women who as children have been brought to Jesus that he might touch them. Second, I pray that there will be no child out there in the future who cannot handle life without Jesus and says, "Daddy, I don't want to live anymore" because we somehow failed him.