



*Servant Leadership:*

# You've Got the Tiny Little Baby in Your Hands

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
October 7, 2012 Rev. Larry Moffet

## **\*GOSPEL MARK 10:13-16**

*New Testament, page 47*

People were bringing little children to him  
in order that he might touch them;  
and the disciples spoke sternly to them.

<sup>14</sup> 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.**

<sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of  
God as a little child will never enter it.' <sup>16</sup> And he took them  
up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

We've got some work to do to join Jesus fully in blessing the  
little ones.

We would never sternly order them (as the disciples did in  
today's Gospel scripture) to leave the presence of God, but  
without thinking, we often put roadblocks in their way.

Rev. Stephanie Ahlschwede helped us understand why  
children were excluded.

In Jesus' day children were thought of as "unformed," not  
quite human beings yet. Note that the word "children" is  
used interchangeably with "little ones."

The numbers of "Nones" is growing. That's what a greatly  
respected researcher and sociologist told a packed house at  
the Lied Center Tuesday.

Said Dr. Robert Putnam, "Not 'nuns;'" people who circle  
"None" as their religious affiliation. Before we go into "why"  
please soak in the data:

In the age groups from 18-30: the number of "nones"  
is up (*if I remember data correctly, I was taking notes in a dark  
room*) from 5% until 1990 -- to 35% in 2010.

Preliminary data shows the curve up even steeper  
since 2010, he said.

Why? For the last 3 years I have been trying to get my head  
around what I am about to say: The younger generation does  
not want politics to be a part of their worship. Media reports  
connect Christians with the U.S. right wing political views  
and rationalizations of exclusions of all kinds of people.  
Result: many young people, no matter their politics or  
religious ideas, run the opposite direction and put themselves  
in the secular "none" category. You say your views are not  
right wing? No matter. *Any* political view is often perceived  
by young people as a prelude to or a part of the exclusion  
that is practiced by the most extreme political viewpoints.

When I talk with the young I try to listen very carefully. Most  
pastors my age dispute the research. They conclude "the  
young agree with us on the inclusion of all people, so all we  
need to do is let them know what we think and they will join  
us." Not so, says Putnam. Any political talk is a red flag for  
them.

The disciples turned little ones away because they were sure  
that "what we are doing is right, saying "Let's focus on those

with power, those we know, those we understand. Unformed, not yet fully human little ones will have to wait.

When they get it they can come on board.” They had no time for children. Children could not organize, march, plan, or lead or provide financial support. (Fred Craddock, Preaching Through the Christian Year, p. 434)

Putnam’s research hold good news for us: compared with other nations, religious people of the U.S. are highly devout, highly diverse, and highly tolerant. All three at the same time. That is very good. More good news for us: Mainline Christians are held in very high esteem.

The young are so put off by the ways that some have used politics to push a right wing political agenda that anything you or I say that is perceived as political in worship becomes a huge barrier, a roadblock to their participation in the life of faith. Putnam’s research gives solid data to back up what we have been learning.

There is an additional challenge we face, if those of us who are middle-age and older want to connect in lives of faith with those who are young.

We have also learned that the young do not consider merely talking about things that will make a difference as a way to be a Servant Leader.

They do not want to “process” their way into action. They process and talk about what they are doing AS they are working. Some call this “engaged learning.” This is a huge challenge for those of us who grew up with the understanding that when you realize there is a challenge or a problem first you study it and then you agree on a course of action to deal with it.

Providing opportunities for taking action is extremely important to those under 30. Today, if you can come back you will see that in our Peace Meal:

We are literally giving students an opportunity to do something that makes a difference, and then as part of the sharing of what they have done with us, they will reflect and put into words what they are learning.

Every time I describe this need for of action-reflection to someone my age or older I get a huge pushback. “What they **need** is to study problems first.”

The need of those under age 30 to learn while doing is so strong that we need to pay attention. We will continue, at times, to study something first and then work on the issue. That is a valid way of linking our faith and our lives. Other times we will start “doing” and work in ways to reflect and fine-tune our efforts as we continue taking action.

We will need to be able to support both ways of doing and learning to not place roadblocks in the faith-journeys of the young the way the Disciples put up barriers to children being present with Jesus

At times, those of us who grew into our faith by thinking our way into acting will need to remind ourselves that it is also valid to work together and develop relationships while we are working and then to think through what we have been doing and how we can improve our efforts as we are serving side-by-side. In fact, many cultures in the world, such as those in Latin America are very clear that we establish relationships first, and do things together before we define our relationship status with each other. Those trained in U.S. business and academic cultures often get stymied in their work with people in Latin America because of our tendency to want to define roles, responsibilities and processes first before relationships are forged.

There is plenty of room for hope. Hard data, Dr. Putnam states, indicates that even if the “nones” say they are not affiliated religiously, they are attracted by principles that guide religious faith: openness, inclusion, hope, and joy.

They also are interested in ways traditions can convey deeper-than-conscious meaning. We have seen that over and over again here at First Church. Many students freely express their love the sense of holy, the majesty of worship, even if they have no “faith background.” The most students attend our most liturgical worship service--10:45. Over and over again, students who describe themselves as on the margins of the faith, or as a “none” say they like Communion. They call it is a way to be “one” with God and others. They say things like “I don’t understand it, but I like going forward and feeling like I am connecting with God and humanity.

Can we connect with the young? children? the littlest ones? with those who will be born? To put it another way: What do you want the life of faith to be like for your grandchildren’s children? Remember that right now:

**You’ve got the tiny, little baby in your hands, in your arms...**

The littlest ones ***are here***. Will you, by actions or words, turn them away?

A young Associate Pastor, Kathy Wolfe Reed, a brand new mother, wrote (in Christian Century, October 3, 2012): When I led youth and children’s church camps I wish I had been more patient with the questions of the young. I wish I had understood how important my work was, to “relive weary parents of their energetic children and given those little ones an understanding of Jesus’ fierce love for them. I think about how one day my little tiny Hannah will find that her childlike faith has been blurred with the complications of a broken world. When we bring Hannah to be baptized, people will promise to nurture her and love her like their own.”

Children are brought to receive Jesus’ blessing and so are we.” (Craddock, p. 434)

Dr. Putnam closed his lecture with some truly good news for us. Religious people are nicer, he says. All data with measurable standards show marked differences between us and the general population. We are more generous. We give money not only to the church, and to secular causes. We are more active in community building work, and we do more good deeds.

**Is this because we are worried about judgment? No.  
Is this because we believe the right things. No.**

Research shows that even if you are an atheist who goes to church you are twice as nice as people in the general population. Why?

There is something about having church friends that makes you nicer.

Church friends have a super-charged effect on the happiness of our lives.

Dr. Putnam suggests having more church suppers and fewer sermons!

With that, I’ll stop. And let’s remember always, that like Jesus :

**We’ve got the tiny, littlest ones our hands...  
in our arms...**

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