

Presbytery Youth & Discipleship Support Worker-Commissioning Service

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Preacher: Rev. James MacIver

[0 : 00] O Lord, our gracious God, we recognize from these words we have sung in your praise that you call upon the whole of your creation to praise you, not only the earth but throughout the whole universe. Throughout your creation you call forth praises to your name. Yet you have given us as human beings that special capacity to give you praise and to converse with you and to hold fellowship with you. We bless you tonight for this opportunity of doing so once again.

We thank you, Lord, that you have gathered us together at this time to worship you and also to commission one who will be presiding over the youth work of this presbytery. We give thanks, O Lord, for the prospects that you hold forth in the gospel for us as we come to declare this gospel in the world in which you have set us. We give thanks that your word does not return to you empty, that you send it forth to accomplish that which you have purposed. And we thank you, Lord, that that purpose remains as it has been in your own eternal being, whatever things we may see changing in our own circumstances or in the world in which we live. We thank you today, Lord, for belonging to your church in this world. You know that we know that this is a great privilege you have given us.

And we thank you for the many advantages we have in belonging to your church, to that visible number of few people that worship you regularly, that confess your name and that hold forth that confession before the world. We pray that you'd bless the gospel amongst us, O Lord, as a people. We seek your blessing, Lord, in our day so that we may also be equipped as other generations before us to go forth in your name in the confidence that your word is indeed your revelation to us of yourself and of your salvation, of your glory in Christ Jesus and in the way in which you provide for us so liberally and abundantly, even the provision of our ordinary provisions.

We thank you, O Lord, that we gather together today, this evening as a presbytery with your people here and from other places. We bless you, O Lord, that your promise is that you will be with your people, that you will manifest yourself amongst them, that you will show yourself through your word and by your spirit. We pray that that may be our experience here, Lord, this evening. We give thanks for the way in which you provided for us in the past and continue to provide for our young people especially.

[2 : 50] We pray for our young people. We pray for those of them here this evening. We pray for all the young people and children throughout the presbytery bounds in all our congregations. We thank you for those who dedicate themselves to their teaching, who add to what they receive at home so that in Sunday school and other classes, in fellowships and other meetings. Lord, from time to time we know that your gospel and your claims are set forth. We do pray that as you have been pleased in the past to bless such a work, we pray that you continue to bless it in days to come. We pray that you would bless all preparing for the work of youth camps. We thank you for all who dedicate themselves to help in that regard. We pray that you would, Lord, be preparing young people who have applied for these camps so that they will come as they come under the influence of the gospel, that they will come to know yourself and that they will come to avail themselves of the salvation that is in you. We ask your blessing, Lord, to be upon Gordon this evening. We give thanks for him and for his willingness to accept the work of overseeing the youth work of the presbytery. And, Lord, we ask in our congregations that we may continue to support and uphold him prayerfully. And we ask, Lord, as we meet together in relation to this this evening, we ask that in days to come we may know much fruit and consequence. We pray that you would be gracious to him at all times. And so we pray your blessing now to remain with us here and to go before us.

And we commit all of this to you, confessing our sin and, Lord, confessing our need of your cleansing daily. And we ask that you would forgive our sins and that you would assure us that our sins indeed are forgiven. If we confess them, you are faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So receive us, we pray now, and pardon us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Now, reading of God's word in the scripture is in Mark's gospel, the gospel of Mark and beginning at verse 13. And we'll sing, sorry, we'll read down as far as verse 31.

So Mark chapter 10, verse 13. They were bringing children to Jesus that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them.

But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, Let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

[5 : 48] And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.

And he said to him, Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth. And Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, You lack one thing. Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

And come, follow me. Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, How difficult it would be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

[7 : 07] And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, Who then can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, With man it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God.

Peter began to say to him, See, we have left everything and followed you. Jesus said, Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life.

But many who are first will be last, and the last first. Amen. We pray God will bless to us that reading of his word.

Now if you could turn with me, please, to the passage that we read in Mark chapter 10, and verses 13 to 16.

I could just read through these verses again. Mark 10 at verse 13, And they were bringing children to Jesus, that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant, and said to them, Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

[8 : 35] Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child, shall not enter it. And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Now you know something is up when Jesus is annoyed. In fact, he's more than just annoyed. The word there, indignant, is a very strong word. So you know that something seriously is up when Jesus is indignant.

It's a word that expresses very deep emotion, and something that obviously his mind is attached to in such a way as finds fault with it.

And it's actually something that would be surprisingly if it were absent in certain circumstances in the Bible where you find the word used. For example, when he came to raise Lazarus from the dead, it's used in terms of the indignation, the inner turmoil of his soul as he came towards the grave, the sepulcher, in which Lazarus had been laid.

In other words, you find from that an indication, a clear indication, that Jesus was indignant at death, indignant at what had happened to the human beings that he had created for life.

[9 : 55] And yet here was a sample of them held fast in death in the sepulcher where Lazarus' body was laid. And he's here indignant with his own disciples.

Very clearly, it's against them that he actually says this. They rebuked those who were bringing the children to Jesus. And so Jesus, indignant, said to them, Let the children come to me.

Do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Why is it so important? Why was Jesus so indignant about what seems really to be a thing of no great consequence?

Maybe the disciples were actually well-meaning enough because these were actually infants. They were very young children. And you might think that's quite natural or understandable why the disciples would not want such young children to come to Jesus or at least such parents to bother Jesus as they would see it with such young children.

But that's not how Jesus saw it. Their place was also in the kingdom of God. And he used that as an illustration so that except, he said, we become like little children.

[11 : 16] Do you know, whoever does not become like little children or here does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. In other words, Jesus is saying little children belong to the kingdom of God but they're also illustrative of the kind of spirit, the kind of attitude that should characterize those who would seek to be members of the kingdom of God.

So here's Christ's command first of all and then we'll look briefly at Christ's explanation of it. His command is let the children come to me and do not hinder them.

It's a two-sided command. He's first of all saying let them come to me. The words are addressing obviously what you find in verse 13. And it means a very positive action is required by the words that Jesus is saying.

This is a command for positive action. And you take from that in terms of our own children and young folks in the church that it's a positive action that's required on our part as parents or as grandparents or in what we're going to be doing tonight to set apart Gordon to oversee the work of youth work of the presbytery.

We take from this that it's not enough to let children settle and find their own way in life. It's not enough just simply to leave them to make up their own minds as to whether they'll accept Jesus or not.

[12 : 45] Of course it's a very personal matter at the end of the day whether we're children or adults whether we're middle-aged or old or young. But the fact is this is really a counter to the kind of idea that says you know you shouldn't really be putting things before children in such a way that calls upon them to consider the kingdom of God the importance of Jesus the importance of faith.

That's not to say at all that we believe in forcing children's minds. What I'm saying is here is Jesus actually commending to us to bring the children to him.

To use whatever means we have available to us to actually make sure that our children are not left to themselves and not left open to the ideas that you find in the world as to what constitutes a proper well-founded well-rounded human life.

Bring them he says to me let them come to me positively bring them here. And so as we are here tonight to set apart Gordon to the oversight of youth work in the presbytery this is what we are responsible for ourselves as parents or grandparents or those who teach in Sunday schools it's particularly the important work of parents because we're not to let the children of the church the children of our families not just that they shouldn't be left to find their own way in life but also we should actually have it in such a way in our minds that we give them every positive encouragement and every means available to us to come to know the Lord himself and one of the reasons that Gordon is appointed to youth work to oversee the youth work of the presbytery is that that work itself very much fits into what Jesus is actually saying here you're not just saying to us do this at home or do this in Sunday school we're setting

Gordon apart because we believe as a presbytery that he has the skills that he has the interest that he has the prayerful concern that he has the ability to be overseer of the youth work of the presbytery and that it is the burden of his heart as it is of ours to bring the children into contact with Jesus to bring the truth of Jesus before them to show them the value that they ought to place upon Christ upon his gospel upon the church everything that God has given us positively so as to encourage our children towards accepting Jesus as their saviour and of course the other side of it really is do not hinder them and that really reminds us that there's the positive side let the children come to me bring them to me but there's the other side as well do not hinder them in other words don't put anything before them that would cause them to stumble that would cause them somehow

or other to put them off that's a big challenge in itself and it reminds us that we need to support [16:03] Gordon not just prayerfully and practically but by our own way of life by our example for our children whether we're ministers elders parents grandparents we are not to hinder them we're not to have anything as far as possible in our life or in our lifestyle that will actually put our children off following the Lord coming to know the Lord and you can see why that is such a great challenge to myself and to everybody else in other words that applies to our way of life how we behave towards them towards each other it applies to our conversation how we speak how we speak of Jesus how we speak of God how we speak of other people what they hear us saying about the church what they hear us saying about the Lord about our relationship to God what they see us doing in relation to our relationship to God that they see not only that we worship him that we do a delight in that worship that it's of primary importance to us in all the activities of life and there's so many other things that we could mention in relation to not hindering our children so there's a positive side of the encouragement there's the negative side of not hindering them not placing anything in their way that would somehow or other be an offence to them or put them off from following the Lord so that's

Christ's command when Jesus saw this rebuking by the disciples he in turn was indignant and said let them come to me do not hinder them and then he says for to such belongs the kingdom of God so you come to Christ's explanation of his command or of his instruction for to such belongs the kingdom of God why does he use a child and a very young child at that to illustrate what it really means to belong to the children of God or who they are that are members of the kingdom of God that children illustrate for us what is it about a child that helps to illustrate the point that Jesus is making for to such belongs to those like them belongs the kingdom of God well it's first of all it has the element of trust that doesn't mean that children will believe anything you tell them you just try it and see you'll soon find out that's not the case that's not what it means at all that you just give them things and they're going to believe it anyway but what it does mean is that when they have come to learn from a parent particularly just think of a parent a loving parent a concerned parent and when children learn to trust a loving parent then they accept their word sometimes they may kick against it sometimes they may think well it's not such a good thing that

I'm being called on to do by my mum or my dad or my grandpa whoever but if they've learned to trust us if they know our word is sure if we're backing that up with a proper biblical Christian way of life then what they are given by us by adults will actually be acceptable to them by and large and if we prove that we are trustworthy especially that's when they will come to accept what we lay before them in our teaching we have to actually show ourselves to be trustworthy people and if they suspect us or are suspicious of us for good reason then you don't then express surprise if they're reluctant to accept whether it's advice or teaching or whatever so we're in the position where we need to have a trustworthy approach to them where we need to actually remove suspicion so that they will come to believe that when we talk about

Jesus we're talking about the most important person and the most important issues to ourselves and to them the most important things of all in life and along with that and this will be very much part of Gordon's own approach I'm sure in his own way of doing it there are different ways in which it's done of course but it's very very important to remove suspicions about God because when we come to trust in God we come to trust in him by accepting his word free of any suspicion that somehow or other he's misleading us or is not to be trusted or that there's something there that really causes us to hesitate in accepting whatever he's setting before us so just as we do that on a human level it's part of our concern and part of our activity in the church to actually make sure that all the suspicions out there that you find in the world about God and all the negativity about God and everything that would cause us if we just listened to it and accepted to be suspicious of God or the motives of God or what is in the Bible as God's word you teach the children so that that suspicion is removed if it's there so that you try and overcome it as much as you can and ask God to come to show the children how trustworthy he is and help us to do that so that they will come not to suspect him or to suspect his goodness or to challenge his wisdom or his motives in other words we're dealing with sincerity sincerity in terms of finding that we are trustworthy and present God as trustworthy for our children's benefit and so that trust that trust in someone who is trustworthy is a significant part of what we do in terms of bringing our children to know what the gospel is setting before us and of course secondly there's their acceptance for of such or to such belongs the kingdom of God as I said if you have a child that sees that a parent or whoever is

trustworthy then they will tend to accept the word of that person even if they don't fully understand yet why it is they need to do the things you want them to do or call upon them to do when you come to think about what it means to accept

[22 : 41] God to accept God's word we don't come to God that's why he's saying here of such or to such or to such like belongs the kingdom of God whenever we come anybody who comes to accept God as their savior as their God and his word as his word you don't come as you perhaps do in a marketplace or whatever you don't come and you start haggling over things you don't start bargaining with God you don't start to-ing and fro-ing in your interaction with him believing trusting believing accepts his word and we have to understand anyway that God is not selling us salvation that's not what we're about we're not asking people children or adults to buy this salvation to do something in their own merit or by their own effort that will earn them the favor of God God is not selling the kingdom to us he's offering it to us it's his gift to us

Jesus as he's central to the kingdom and the values of the kingdom is God's great gift to us and as he's offered in the offer of the gospel we teach our children they haven't earned that we haven't earned that we're not trying to get them in some way or other to buy that it's not something that we present in that way it's God's great gift and we accept God's pardon we accept God's righteousness we accept God's peace we accept the terms of reconciliation we accept the kingdom we receive the kingdom we accept God's rule we accept his throne and his right to rule we accept God's rights they're all accepted as gifts they're accepted because God is God and then you see in verse 17 an interesting this passage that follows is very much fitted in with what we have in verses 13 to 16 there as he was setting out on his journey a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life well he's missed the entrance to the kingdom hasn't he what must I do to inherit eternal life it's not about what I must do it's about my accepting what God has done these are the terms on which we come to accept salvation

I come to accept the Lord as our saviour so this man really has gone past the door he's missed it and so Jesus leads him to deal with the crucial difficulty in his life he's just got a love of material things he can't see beyond them that's really what he's tied up with that's what the concern of his heart is and Jesus is saying to him you've got to let that go you've got to change your priority you've got to take up something else as your priority in other words come and follow me get rid of the baggage of your life and instead accept the gift of God and that's what the psalmist also said isn't it when he asked the question what shall I render to the Lord for all his gift to me how did he answer that he said

I will take the cup of salvation and pay my vows before the Lord he didn't say I will give or I will earn I will take the cup of salvation I'll accept what God gives me as this life that he has rendered that he has purchased for me and finally I think we can say that in this as well you can see an element of joy because children are not just seen as those who trust the word of those that they have confidence in and not just acceptance so child likeness on the part of Christians we are to be like children in trusting God in accepting the gift of God but thirdly the joy just look at a child's face when they receive a gift that they've asked for or perhaps not asked for but that they value after all isn't that what happens mostly at Christmas time and they come even if they've asked and they know exactly what they've asked for and they think that's what they're getting maybe there'll be a bit of complaint if it's something else than what they've asked for but anyway the gift as it's unwrapped you can see the joy because there is something new something that is precious something that they value and how it should be with us too we have to convey as much as we can to our children the wonder of what it means to be a

Christian the wonder of God's grace the wonder of his love the wonder of being a citizen of his kingdom the wonder of his mercy and of his forgiveness and of his acceptance of us as his children adoption of us as his children everything indeed that belongs to that loving and saving relationship that God has with us we value in such a way that has to convey surely that we rejoice in that that we have a joy in our lives as Christians that you can only have when God is your God and Jesus is your King and that's the joy of being childlike joy of knowing security the joy of thinking I'm safe I have the best parent possible I love my father I love my brothers and sisters in the Lord all of that we're seeking to convey to our children when we're thinking of the children as illustrative of the kingdom of God and the occupants and the subjects of that kingdom and Christ command then let them come to me and do not hinder them and his explanation as it involves trust and acceptance and joy and that is our ongoing prayer for our children for our young people throughout the

presbytery and indeed further afield that these elements of trust and acceptance and joy in Jesus will be theirs and that they will show it too as they grow up and come to years well we come now to what

[29 : 51] I'm going to do by way of prayer and that's just to set apart Gordon to the work the youth work that he is to oversee in the presbytery for the presbytery not sure if he wants to say anything himself or not he doesn't okay I was going to give you a chance after the prayer if you wanted to say something but if not that's absolutely fine so I'm just going to ask Gordon to stand while we pray and I'm also going to include after the prayer of commissioning I'm going to include a prayer for a blessing on the food that we'll receive and then I'll finish with the benediction so let's join together in prayer Almighty God we acknowledge that you are the Lord of all life that you are the one who presides over your church as its head and king and we give thanks O Lord that you have reminded us this evening that our young people our children even from their infancy are incorporated into that visible body that bear your name in this world and we give thanks

O Lord for all that we're able to do in regard to presenting them with the gospel in nurturing and caring for them under the direction of your truth and we know that the apostle John could say of his children though some were adults and called them so because they were his beloved family that he had no greater joy than to know that his children walked in the truth Lord we also would say the same of our children and of ourselves we would have no greater joy than the children of this present generation that they would walk in your truth and we ask O Lord that we may see more and more of this in a world that is so set against the gospel and set against children developing in that proper spiritual and moral way following the pattern of your word protect our children we pray and grant O Lord that you would watch over them in the midst of so many temptations and so many influences that would seek to wean their minds away from your truth and draw them into the immorality of the world we thank you for

Gordon we thank you Lord for his willingness to accept this post we give thanks for the way in which you have gifted him for the knowledge that you have given him and for his concern and dedication to you as his Lord and we give thanks that that concern and dedication to honor and glorify your name is now transferred to his oversight youth work of the presbytery Lord we hereby set him apart and crave your blessing for him protect him we pray in his own life bless him in his own soul enrich him we pray especially by seeing those under his charge coming to develop in a meaningful and beautiful way under the gospel we ask oh Lord that you would help him daily and help us to be a support to him in all the ways in which that is possible for us Lord our God we ask that all of this may be pleasing to you and that in days to come we may see much fruit for his labor and grant to him oh Lord that he may rejoice at all times in the

Lord his God and so receive our thanks we pray now and as we receive of the good things you have provided for our bodily needs we pray gracious one that you would bless that to us and make us thankful for the hands that have provided them and for all the care that you take in looking after us in such a wonderful way we ask now that your grace your mercy and your peace will be our portion now and ever more amen gordon can i just say one or two things to you first of all just to probably welcome you to work in the congregation it's our delight as a presbytery to see you accept this we were praying that you would we know that you're well qualified for it and i want to assure you of the presbytery's full support and you know yourself anyway without me saying it that we are there if you need to come and see us at any time and we will be delighted to receive your reports from time to time and again we trust that god will bless you in the work as it goes on thank you thank you thank you thank you