Being a child in the Father’s House

Hans preached last week on faith hope and love. Today I would like to go deeper on His first point—I want to look at what it means to us to have the faith of a child. Hans mentioned several things: how children are unselfconsciousness and naturally living ‘in the moment’. He mentioned how a child **who knows he or she is loved** dares to step out… that they are not afraid to make a mistake--because that's all part of growing up.

There are deeper layers to this. Jesus seems to tell us that we must become like a child. Why is this? How can we do this? *Does maturity mean that we have to be serious all of the time?* It somehow feels like a paradox, because children grow, and we all want to grow up, right? Can we go back? I guess that our question today is, “How can Jesus-followers still be growing toward maturity and somehow child-like at same time?”

**Definition of Kingdom of G**od: kingdom is the relationship of the king with his people. His household, ***where he is trusted by his people***. His house. Jesus says that God is our Father. That this is the way he wants to be known. So the k of G is about the way things are—faith hope and love-- in Father's house. For. Today, we’ll call it that. Kingdom of God= **the way things are—faith, hope and love-- in the Father’s house**

**Definition of 'enter'**: to take part, function as part of (PROCESS, not limited to a one-time event )

So, Jesus says, If you want to be part of the Father's household, if you want to function like one of the family, you've got to become like a little child. Enter= function as part of

Does that mean be childish? We can distinguish between childish (being immature in behavior) and childlike (trusting the parent, an inner quality).

**Definition childlike:** inner quality of a child who trusts the parent. The child who is safely and lovingly connected with the parent is free to explore, love, make mistakes, and live life with others also in the 'house'. Childlike= inner quality of being a child trusting parent

We are getting a bit closer to having a definition of maturity. To do that let’s look at the texts. The context is important. 3 texts

Matteus 18:1-4 Op dat moment kwamen de leerlingen Jezus vragen: ‘Wie is eigenlijk de grootste in het koninkrijk van de hemel?’ Hij riep een kind bij zich, zette het in hun midden neer en zei: ‘Ik verzeker jullie: als je niet verandert en wordt als een kind, dan zul je het koninkrijk van de hemel zeker niet binnengaan. Wie zichzelf vernedert en wordt als dit kind, die is de grootste in het koninkrijk van de hemel. En wie in mijn naam één zo’n kind bij zich opneemt, neemt mij op.

Marcus 10:15-16 Ik verzeker jullie: wie niet als een kind openstaat voor het koninkrijk van God, zal er zeker niet binnengaan.’ Hij nam de kinderen in zijn armen en zegende hen door hun de handen op te leggen.

Lukas 18:9-17 Met het oog op sommigen die zichzelf rechtvaardig vinden en anderen minachten, vertelde hij de volgende gelijkenis. ‘Twee mensen gingen naar de tempel om te bidden, de een was een farizeeër en de ander een tollenaar. De farizeeër stond daar rechtop en bad bij zichzelf: “God, ik dank u dat ik niet ben als de andere mensen, die roofzuchtig of onrechtvaardig of overspelig zijn, en dat ik ook niet ben als die tollenaar. Ik vast tweemaal per week en draag een tiende van al mijn inkomsten af.” De tollenaar echter bleef op een afstand staan en durfde niet eens zijn blik naar de hemel te richten. In plaats daarvan sloeg hij zich op de borst en zei: “God, wees mij zondaar genadig.” Ik zeg jullie, hij ging naar huis als iemand die rechtvaardig is in de ogen van God, maar die ander niet. Want wie zichzelf verhoogt zal vernederd worden, maar wie zichzelf vernedert zal verhoogd worden.’

De mensen probeerden ook kleine kinderen bij hem te brengen om ze door hem te laten aanraken. Toen de leerlingen dat zagen, berispten ze hen. Maar Jezus riep de kinderen bij zich en zei: ‘Laat ze bij me komen, houd ze niet tegen, want het koninkrijk van God behoort toe aan wie is zoals zij. Ik verzeker jullie: wie niet als een kind openstaat voor het koninkrijk van God, zal er zeker niet binnengaan!’

In all three settings, Jesus takes up a child in his arms, and talks to his followers about their immature behavior and attitudes.

What we observe:

Children in this culture: Recall that a child in this setting is not the center of attention that is so often the case in our western world. A child in Jesus' day knew that he or she had a lowly position in society. I'm not saying they were despised, *for that is certainly not the case*. I'm saying that they **knew that they didn’t know it all.** Confident first of all in the parent. Children need to trust the parent, to listen, respect, adapt in order to grow up and thrive in the family—and eventually to thrive in their own homes.

In families, a lot of growing up happens as we learn to get along with other people, like brothers and sisters. When you are living in close contact with each other in a family, it can be challenging!

In the face of our humanness, some family dynamics keep on repeating themselves. Things like, ‘Give and take’, ‘say sorry, and accept each other’. ‘Be comforted and give comfort’.

Both the disciples and the Pharisee were immature in their behavior and attitudes. **They were interested in who was greatest!** That meant they saw each other in a competitive way. That their value was not established. It went up and down, and every time they had to look around to see if they were valuable compared to other people. That means they weren't trusting the Father for their value. This is what we see kids doing on the playground: looking for ways to get on top by elbowing one another one off the road. In the Luke text, the Pharisee, bragging to God during his prayers, seems to think that the Father looks at him in comparison to the other, despised, tax collector—and seems to think that God favors him because of his good behavior.

We see that true maturity has to do with living in our identity (Specifically our identity as beloved children of heavenly father), But we also see that our behaviors reveal ***how much we actually live in that identity***.

The disciples have been arguing about who is greatest, and they try to hide it from Jesus. They’re hiding because they know something is wrong here. Watch now how gently Jesus corrects them. Jesus sees their behavior and their hearts. and he lets them know he sees it. **But note that he does this in a kind way.** Why is that? *He wants them to learn where to go with their immaturity.* If he shouted, they would stay ashamed. They were **already** not telling the truth, and hiding from him. Will they listen to him **now** and learn to trust?

**Will we listen to him now and learn to trust? The thing is, we will always struggle with immature behavior because our trust in the Father *is still being formed,* and will still be forming, all of our lives.**

But Jesus’ trust is perfect, and Jesus says he will help us.

Fil. 2:3-5 Handel niet uit geldingsdrang of eigenwaan, maar acht in alle bescheidenheid de ander belangrijker dan uzelf. Heb niet alleen uw eigen belangen voor ogen, maar ook die van de ander. Laat onder u de gezindheid heersen die Christus Jezus had.

Let your attitude be like that of Jesus. Let = allow, agree

So, Jesus says (my paraphrase):

“pay attention: ‘greatness’ is not the big issue here. Being part of the Father’s house is the issue.

If you want to enjoy life in the Father's house, this is what you’ve got to do: you've got to get used to trusting the Father. In your humanness, with your ups and downs, your successes and your shortcomings, you've got to (just like this child I am holding in my arms) practice allowing the Father to hold you, you’ve got to practice accepting how he values you, practice letting him comfort you and practice letting him set you back on your feet after falling.”

The disciples are learning to live in the family by trusting Jesus. They have come to the right place with their immaturity! He hasn’t yelled at them, or rejected them. Instead, he gently steers them toward greater trust in the Father.

Their example gives us hope: Jesus gives us the room to be ‘in process’: to be childish and mature at the same time. We trust the Father. And we can relax into his love and live in the family together.

Here is a story that illustrates the kind of hope we have

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I met my ‘fitness coach’ last week. He told me that he used to work as a Counselor at a summer camp for homeless children in New York. He did this for about 4 summers, and he said it left a deep mark in his life. There were several 3 week camps every summer. Imagine a photo of Kids arriving the first day--  tough, disillusioned, some of them gang kids. Kids who experienced things kids should not. They were city kids, and weren't used to doing fun things or sports. Everything is stupid, boring...their eyes are rolling. That's one picture: got it? Now imagine the photograph of the same kids at the end of the three weeks. These kids have had three weeks of individual attention from the counsellors-- they have experienced love and respect in the camp culture. They've had a lot of fun too.

The counsellor said, all of them, from the tall and bulky to the tiny ones—were crying—on that last day, and laughing too in front of the busses that would take them home. Some of the older kids were so changed by this camp experience that they were selected to be trained as counsellors for other kids at future camps.

These kids weren’t changed by three weeks of sports and vacation. They grew because they felt loved and valued by these counsellors. These counsellors, at great cost to themselves, spent all their energies loving these kids. These counsellors are like Jesus.

Wrapping up: Maturity is not about being perfect. It’s not about the goal of ‘eventually never making mistakes’. It’s not about being only serious all of the time. Jesus-Maturity is knowing where to go when your thoughts and actions are childish—it’s about trusting him to comfort, teach, encourage, and strengthen us.

**Definition of Jesus-Maturity**: growing in confidence that you are a beloved child of the father, and knowing where to go (trusting Papa) when your thoughts and actions are childish

The pattern of this world is that we must be self-sufficient and take care of ourselves. Paul wrote:

Rom.12:2 U moet uzelf niet aanpassen aan deze wereld, maar veranderen door uw gezindheid te vernieuwen, om zo te ontdekken wat God van u wil en wat goed, volmaakt en hem welgevallig is.

Through this text, I believe Jesus says to us this morning, people, let’s turn this around. Being childlike remains **who we are** every day. We need God’s help to become ‘Jesus-mature believers’. Every time we put our trust in the Father, we are growing in our identity as beloved child. This is like declaring: “no, world: we refuse to become perfectionists, people who can’t make mistakes. We refuse to become people who demand perfection of each other! Our identity and value as human beings is found in what the Father says about us!” It’s not easy to live this way in our world… but his love shining through us is exactly what the world needs, so he sends us out … as beloved children!

Rom. 8:19 De schepping ziet er reikhalzend naar uit dat openbaar wordt wie Gods kinderen zijn.

For house groups

Some practical questions to take away

Do you ever find that comparison with other people (or with your own ‘best self’) is an issue for you?

If you find yourself playing the comparison game, let it be a sign that you need to go to the Father. What things can you do (habits, reminders?) to give room for God to speak to your heart about how valuable you are, how precious, to him?

Is perfectionism an issue for you? How does this affect how you view the behavior of others?

Do you ever experience that you *just know* your attitude is not in line with who Jesus is? It just feels wrong. We do things that are not in line with our real identity in Him. What do you do with that?

Deeper into the texts:

Jesus says we must become like little children. Discuss these verses, and how God provides for us that we can live in his house, trusting him as his children

Galatians 4:6 (NIV)

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

6En omdat u zijn kinderen bent, heeft God ons de Geest van zijn Zoon gegeven, die ‘Abba, Vader’ roept.

Philippians. 1:6: being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ

6Ik ben ervan overtuigd dat hij die dit goede werk bij u begonnen is, het ook zal voltooien op de dag van Christus Jezus.