

"From the mouths of babes," Are you familiar with this idiom meaning children can say surprisingly wise or insightful things?

"From the mouths of babes," It's interesting that this phrase is a shortened version of some biblical passages, including Psalms 8:2 and Matthew 21:16, where God commends the dependence, trust, and openness in the love of infants and children. And of course this saying touches on the first few verses of our Gospel for today.

In our Gospel of Luke, parents bring their children to be blessed by Jesus. His disciples turn them away (Luke 18:15-17), & Jesus rebukes them, declaring that the "kingdom of God belongs to such as these". He teaches that those who do not receive the kingdom of God, a kingdom of loving relationships, "like a little child", will not enter it.

In the Gospels there are several instances of Jesus using little children to illustrate his message. But let's focus first on this opening of today's Gospel (Luke 18:15-17). Jesus' message to his disciples was very clear: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these". Here Jesus emphasizes that to enter the kingdom of God, a kingdom of loving

relationships, one must receive it with the same childlike faith—marked by dependence, trust, and openness in love - like a small child.

As an aside, it's very interesting that very early in this same Gospel (2: 41-52), Luke, refers to the wisdom & insight of one particular young child, the twelve-year-old Jesus found teaching in the temple./

So 'from the mouths of babes'As a parent, grandparent, a teacher & then in ministry I have frequently witnessed wisdom & insight 'from the mouths of babes'.

From time to time, when we have had children in our Sunday service, I have given a 'kids talk', often in the form of a discussion which aims to lead them towards an understanding at their level, of the gospel message for the day. And occasionally a child will 'blow me away' with their answer to one of my 'leading questions', an answer which I had not anticipated & an answer which can take me in new directions in my understanding of Jesus'. Richard Rohr calls this attitude that a child can bring the "beginner's mind".

A 'beginner's mind', he explains, opens. us to awe, wonder, and true presence in our relationship with God, with others & with the whole of Creation. A beginner's mind brings an openness, to be always excited and engaged in these relationships . It's as if children coming in this way are ready to see & embrace 'the other' in a new way, a way free of those filters which come with the complexities of the adult brain. Another commentator has said that 'the beginner's mind is in someone who's not locked into their thinking & attitudes'. There's still a freedom, a willingness to see things & their relationships differently.

A beginner's mind is that mind before the hurts of life have made it cautious and self-protective.

The older we get, the more we've been betrayed and hurt and disappointed, the more barriers we put up to our beginner's mind. So we move further & further away from the immediate delight, curiosity & openness of small children. Jesus however argues that we must never presume that we 'get', that we understand & grasp it all, that we must always be ready to see anew./ But it's so hard to go back, to be vulnerable in this way, and to say to our soul that "I don't know it all" , "there's still room to grow", And Jesus encourages his followers to think of themselves as an erased blackboard, ready to be written on. Because by and large, what blocks Jesus' foundational teaching, especially on our relationships with each other & with Him, is the assumption that we already 'get that', or that we don't need to know any further, we don't need to grow in our attitudes & understandings in our relationships!/
So we have to pray for the grace of "the beginner's mind". We need to say with the blind man, "I want to see" (Mark 10:51). A faith relationship is about being open to 'seeing'. It's not about earning or achieving. It's more about relationships, ultimately our relationship with God, rather than any results or requirements. Once we are open to each relationship, once we truly 'see' them, the rest follows. The life of our journey in Jesus is lived within us, and we learn how to say yes to that life.

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Progressive commentators point out that in this instance in Luke's Gospel, it is when Jesus' followers are missing the point of his message, as in today's Gospel, not listening to the deeper meaning of what he is trying to teach them about loving one another & therefore Him, that he brings a child in front of them & says something like "I'm

telling you once and for all, if you do not go back to square one and open your mind like a child, you will never be able to see the new reality of love that I am bringing.”

In other instances, similar advice follows when his disciples become bogged down in deep theological arguments at an ideological level . Basically, Jesus says you’re wasting your time. He’s telling them “You’re not seeking the essential truth of what I’m trying to teach you about our relationship; you’re just seeking to be in control. Give over that control. Come as a child with an open mind, ready to listen .”

Author Cole Arthur Riley in his book ‘ This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories That Make Us’ identifies the freedom available to us when we return to a childlike awe and wonder. He reminds us ‘we have much to learn from the openness of a child, but we seldom take the time to do so. And when we do encounter such freedom in a child, we can choose to participate in their liberation, or we can grow to resent that freedom in them. We can even brand their words in derogatory terms such as “childish and juvenile”, in contrast to our serious adult minds! ‘ ‘This is’, Riley says, ‘a feigned superiority’. ‘The tragedy is that as we have distanced ourselves from the delight of our youth, & in doing so we’ve become increasingly prone to disillusionment. Now wonder (or awe) and beauty, are not precise cures for disillusionment; but they certainly can stave off the despair of such disillusionment’. /He continues, ‘to reclaim the awe of our child-selves, to allow ourselves to be taken by the beauty of a thing, allows goodness to take up the space which it is often denied in our interior worlds.’

He concludes’ as,we grow older, the “serious” becomes an unsatisfactory substitution for wisdom, andwe become very willing participants in a kind of spiritual maturation that honors the profound and grave, even at the expense of the simple and beautiful’. He goes on, ‘ in fact, the path to wonder is not sophistication or intellect or

articulation; it is a clock wound backward.... a return to 'the beginner's mind'

Riley concludes: 'faith is held together by wonder (& awe) by every defiant commitment to presence, to 'knowing' & paying attention to the other . I cannot tell you with precision what makes the sun set, but I can tell you how those colors, blurred together in those moments of the setting sun calm my head and change my breath. I will die knowing I lived a faith that changed my breathing. A faith that made me believe I could see air.'

Can you recall such a moment of encounter & engagement, with the awe & wonder of 'a beginners' mind of a little child:perhaps:

in witnessing a sunset, a night sky or another of nature's grand vistas;
or

in experiencing art or culture, standing before a great painting, or
immersing oneself in a live music concert; or

through learning and exploring something or somewhere new; or

in a deep encounter with another - perhaps a friend, or your young
child or grandchild;

or simply knowing God's presence, whether that be in joy or sorrow,
or indeed in any moment of your busy day.

I'd encourage you to consciously slow down to appreciate the
presence of God and Her Kingdom in such engagements

To paraphrase Cole Arthur Riley, take those little moments to live
experiences that change your breathing, and in faith. bring you to see
things anew.

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