

CHILDREN, THE KEY TO A WORLD THAT WORKS

If everyone had the attitude of a child...

School for many children is not a pleasant experience. They face intimidation, sarcastic put-downs, mean-spirited competition and bullies. They'll have to act tough and mouth off to survive, and be constantly tempted to smoke, take drugs, get drunk, have sex, join a gang, disrupt the classroom, beat up other kids, vandalize property, and spend ludicrous amounts of time and money on entertainment and clothing.

Kids and their parents who make it through that lot with their sanity intact deserve medals for bravery. So do teachers having to cope with bored, dysfunctional kids in overcrowded classrooms. So do single parents who work their hearts out to keep their kids on the straight and narrow despite the overwhelming influence of the culture.

It's a struggle helping children in this ridiculous world of ours, but there's huge incentive to keep on trying in a comment Jesus made, on the occasion of a group of parents who brought their children to him for a special rabbi's blessing. When his disciples tried to shoo the parents and children away, Jesus was furious. "How dare you stop the children coming to me," he yelled, "let them come, for my world belongs to the likes of them."

What a marvellous insight! God's world, the world Jesus is putting together under our very noses right now, is going to consist entirely of people who are child-like, because children are the key to a world that works.

It's so obvious, though, isn't it?

Think what would happen in the Middle East conflict, for instance, if both Jew and Palestinian recognized their little children as the ideal to aim for. Children aren't the least bit concerned about what race they belong to, or what religious differences they have. They couldn't care less about claiming a piece of land as theirs, and they certainly wouldn't resort to building houses on someone else's land or blowing themselves to bits to get their point across. What ridiculous notions adults get into their heads, that don't enter children's minds at all! If adults could be more like children, our world would be a much better place.

And that was exactly what Jesus told his disciples when they wanted to know which of them would tag the top positions in his eternal kingdom. In response, Jesus beckoned to a young child in the audience, and stood him up in front of everyone.

"The truth is," Jesus said, "none of you will be entering my world unless you change your entire mindset to that of a little child. See this child here? If you want to be in my eternal kingdom, then you be as humble and unassuming as he is. Open your arms to a child and you open your arms to me."

Anyone wanting a place in Jesus' world had better become like a child!

Imagine the shock that must've been for all those high and mighty, self-centred adults to be told that the best preparation they could go through for the eternal world of Jesus' making was to dump their adult attitudes for the attitudes of children!

Our culture would probably recoil in shock at his statement, too, because of its all-consuming addiction to winning at all costs, grasping power, party politics, fear religion, fanatical patriotism, racial discrimination, gender wars, exploitation of the weak, one-upmanship, judging by outward appearance, and imposing one's own perceived rights on others. The result of such all-pervasive adult ugliness, however, is an uphill battle in school and neighbourhood as children pick up our attitudes instead of us picking up theirs.

But the good news for those who open their arms to children, is that they open their arms to Jesus, who is more than willing to relieve us of our adult addictions and lift us into his world, where we can experience the uncluttered loveliness we experienced as children again.

Put in those terms, it's certainly made me look at children through different eyes, because there's our perfect picture of the kind of world Jesus is putting together right now - and what he's making of those who would love a part in that world, as well.

Jesus gave us a wonderful clue, as to what makes a great world and how he's creating it. It's turning adults back into children.