

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ.

It's a snowy Monday morning at school. We are all sitting on the floor in a big circle. The eight to nine year olds keep telling each other what they did this past weekend.

After everybody is finished I ask the children: „What is the kingdom of God“?

My instructor warned me. She told me I shouldn't jump right into this topic with such an hard question. She warned me that I should pick another topic for my teacher's training. She told me that this question would be way to hard for the children to answer.

I asked them anyways. And I'm still astonished by their answers. They weren't really surprised by my question. Nearly all arms raised up and everybody was eager to answer this question. And although this happened six years ago I still remember their answers.

One boy said: „When those homeless people at the train station won't have to beg for money anymore and have a warm place to stay - that's the Kingdom of God.“

Another girl said: „There is no more war, no more fighting.“

Or: „My parents will be nice to each other again.“

After a while I thought by myself - well, what shall I „teach“ those kids about the Kingdom of God... They know all about it...

*Jesus said: Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*

This story from the Gospel of Mark is probably one of the best known stories from the Bible. It is always a touching moment when one of the soon-to-be-Godparents reads it during a baptism service: Jesus blesses the children.

And I ask myself: What would happen if we not only knew this story - what would happen if we took this story seriously? Because it is more than a nice little story that is linked to the baptism of children. This story turns our world upside down. Jesus tells us nothing else than to take children as seriously as any other grown up human being. He tells us: learn from them. They should be our role model.

But instead we think we have to teach them all about the world.

It's in the public discussions as well as in private talks that we ask ourselves what should we teach the kids? What can they, must they, should they learn from us?

I guess everybody here this morning has their opinions about that. The calculation tables - the kids should definitely learn them. And writing. Maybe they should memorize some poems like our grandparents used to. The Ten Commandments - of course. English and Chinese so they have a successful future ahead of them. And they should do some sports as a distraction from all that learning plus it's a good way to learn how to compete. And they should be tech-savvy, right?....

They should learn all this and probably a lot more. We think it's important for them and their future, isn't it?

We want them to fit right in. Fit right into the world, our world, and have a bright future.

But there is one question unanswered: Do the kids really want to be prepared to fit into our world as we want them to?

*Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

It's their world - the kingdom of God.

Learn from the children. Let them be *our* role model.

They are not our Play-Doh figures that we can form the way we want them to be.

Children have their own opinions, their own thoughts and ideas about the kingdom of God and they are bringing this knowledge into our world.

Our world that is so wrong in so many ways.

They are bringing the Gospel to us. The kingdom of God that we, the adults, have so often forgotten about. We don't count on it anymore the way Jesus wants us to do.

Jesus wants us to see the children, the world, through his eyes. He wants them to be our role model. That's why he takes them in his arms and blesses them. They feel his unconditional love that sees them for what they are. They are perfect - he loves them even though they haven't achieved anything yet. They love and believe unconditional and so is Jesus' love toward everybody of us.

That's why we hear this story whenever there is a child getting baptized.

We are all beloved and blessed children of God.

So let's take the children for what they are. Beloved and blessed human beings.

We can learn so much from them - as well as they will learn from us, of course.

As long as we let them teach us their view of the world that surrounds all of us we can teach them a thing or two as well - from a new point of view.

If we take the children and their view of the world for what it is - a vision of the kingdom of God right here among us - if we do so, we will all have a future to build and to live in.

The future - the kingdom of God - it starts right here.

If we let the children teach us some of their knowledge.

I still remember the answers the elementary school kids gave me on this snowy Monday morning six years ago. Just the other day I stranded due to train delays in Lehrte where all of this took place. There were still the same people at the train station begging for money...

There is still so much war and hatred in this world.

I remember the small son of a friend of mine in New York. He played with all the other kids in the playground no matter their skin color. Even though their parents were on different sides of the slide - they didn't care and just had fun with each other.

I remember the kids of some of my friends in Peine with whom we just visited the International Café - a weekly get together between refugees and people from Peine that takes place at one of the parish houses there. The kids were all coloring some leaves and were playing hide-and-seek even though they didn't speak the same language. They understood each other without knowing the right words.

I remember the look of a child that saw snow for the first time in her life.

Let the children teach us one or two things of the world we live in. Let us start to learn how to live in peace and how to stand up to those who are too afraid of people they don't know. Let's come up to the refugees and help them getting settled in this new country. Let's not forget the homeless and poor people around us. Let's stand up to those who think an attack with a knife is the only way to safe world.

Let us start learning from the children *for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these*.

Or let me put it this way: for we are all blessed children of God. We are all baptized and loved by God. The kingdom of God is here right among us.

AMEN.

*Es gilt das gesprochene Wort - D. Wöller*