

Unwritten Agreement

We have this unwritten agreement,
 us members of humanity.
 When the toddler at the coffee shop runs round the
 corner,
 when her mom, at the register, looks up in panic,
 we, the adults in the room, will pledge,
 with quick smiles and silent head nods, to keep watch.
 We will lean out of our seats.
 We will put down our phones.
 We will stand at the ready
 to scoop up,
 to offer words of comfort,
 to make silly faces,
 to keep an eye on the door.
 And we will do this,
 because we cannot ignore the instinct to care.
 We will do this,
 because we cannot ignore the child right in front of us.
 We will do this,
 because love always includes the least of these.

Poem by
 Rev. Sarah Speed

See the Precious Children

BEACH SPRING ("As We Gather at Your Table")



Scan to hear
 the tune!

Words: Anna Strickland (2025)

Music: B. F. White (1844)



See the pre-cious chil - dren seat - ed on the lap of Christ our Lord
 See the pre-cious wi - dowed wo - men glean - ing har - vests from the field
 See the pre-cious for - eign stran - gers as they car - ry all they own
 See the pre-cious dis - poss - essed ones ask - ing for some food to eat
 See the pre-cious world im - pov - erished by our ma - lice and our greed



Called the great - est in the king - dom, held so gent - ly and a - dored They
 Then re - turn - ing to their kit - chen to pre - pare their dai - ly meal They
 To a land that's full of dan - gers for the pow - er - less and prone They
 Sleep - ing un - der star - ry heav - ens, dai - ly liv - ing on the streets They
 Hu - mans, a - ni - mals, and pla - net cry - ing out for some re - lief We're



are pre-cious in the sight of God who made each ti - ny toe In their
 are pre-cious in the sight of God who holds their bro - ken hearts In their
 are pre-cious in the sight of God who made their home - land, too In their
 are pre-cious in the sight of God who loves them as a child In their
 all pre-cious in the sight of God who made each ho - ly thing In our



weak - ness they're held by love as each day they learn and grow
 sor - row they're held by love that re - deems each fra - gile part
 jour - ney they're held by love as they start each day a - new
 hun - ger they're held by love as they guard their hu - man pride
 liv - ing we're held by love as we care for ev - ery being

Read Matthew 19:13-15; Deuteronomy 24:17-22

Commentary | Rev. Dr. Brian Blount

For the Children

For children, we would do anything. Children are the closest thing to a miracle in most of our modern human lives. They are blessings we indulge with the best of our energy, support, protection, attention, and acceptance. We not only welcome them into our company—we make them the center of our attention. We watch what they do. Marvel at how they grow. Attend to what they say.

It was not always so. In Jesus' time, in the company of adults, particularly adults with a sacred agenda, children were an invasive distraction. Humble in both physical stature and emotional maturity, children occupied one of the lowest rungs of social status. Leaders like Jesus were not expected to climb down to their level, and parents ought not to presume lifting them up into his presence. That was the attitude of Jesus' disciples. They mirrored the ethos of their time when Jesus so desperately wanted them to challenge it—by treating children the way they would treat him.

Earlier, Matthew 18:1-5 records an incident where Jesus warns that only those who humble themselves like children will receive entry into the reign of God. He follows up that startling revelation with the even more striking declaration that in welcoming the lowly child, one welcomes Jesus himself. Just a brief time later in Matthew 19:13-15, the disciples attempt to bodyguard Jesus, pushing away every child in range of Jesus' sacred space. In rejecting the children, they are rejecting Jesus.

So Jesus rebukes, not the parents and their children, but his dull disciples. They refuse to entertain the radical truth about God's reign that Jesus is trying so desperately to teach them. The reign of God belongs to children and everyone who, like children, is not granted polite society's respect and acceptance.

The children, then, are a metaphor for all who lack societal status, who so-called decent folk find distasteful and undesirable. The migrant worker. The immigrant. The alien. The homeless. The powerless. The undocumented. Harking back to Deuteronomy 24:17-22, where God commands the people to care for the socially downtrodden because they themselves had been beaten down in Egypt, Jesus issues a clear, if not controversial, command for his followers. They are to live as an *ekklesia*, a “church.” And this church is to exist in this world as a refuge of radical welcome.

In this season of Lent, the good news is that God, through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, extends the same radical welcome even to us. Because we are all lowly sinners, we are all unworthy of acceptance in God's reign. And yet, God promises to receive us as if heaven is our home. Jesus wants his church to offer the same hospitality—to greet those of the lowest stature with the grandest welcome.

Reflect

What's one way your church or community can extend radical welcome?

Fourth Sunday in Lent

the good news is... protection & care for the vulnerable

Read Matthew 19:13-15

Artist Statement | Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell

For my little niece, Angelina, whose art rests at the heart of this composition, and in whose joy we glimpse the Kingdom of God—alongside her sisters, Angelika and Ariana.

At the center of this work is a drawing made by my five-year-old niece, Angelina. I watched her joyfully scribble it in under three minutes, churning out drawing after drawing and handing each one to me with an eager smile. In this piece, she first drew a self-portrait (her wearing a crown), then graciously decided to include me (taking some creative liberties in giving me a third arm!). I imagine the scene in Matthew 19: toddlers wailing, little ones slipping from their parents' arms, parents offering apologetic glances toward the frowning disciples as the scene around Jesus grows increasingly disorderly and loud. Those of us who've participated in group infant baptisms and baby dedications (when one cries, the chain reaction begins!), have led children's sermon moments with restless kids squirming about, or had the joy of watching our little ones participate in a kids' choir performance that goes delightfully rogue, can easily relate.

The disciples, feeling the weight of being seen as serious leaders alongside their rabbi, Jesus, may have tried to preserve a sense of reverence by shooing away the parents bringing their children to him. Yet here, Jesus reorients his disciples (and us) away from the illusion of control and reminds us that it is the joyful, unruly, sincere presence of a child to whom the kingdom truly belongs. Just a chapter earlier, in Matthew 18, Jesus tells his followers that unless they become like little children, they will not even enter the kingdom. Surely the disciples thought Jesus couldn't mean that literally—right?

While I've been busy making art, Angelina has been busy *being* an artist. I surely could learn a thing or two from her about inheriting the kingdom.

Look

*Contemplate the gold shapes in the image.
What do they represent to you?*



Let the Little Children Come | Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell
11"x14" Acrylic, gold leaf, pen, on paper

Fourth Sunday in Lent

the good news is... protection & care for the vulnerable

Read Deuteronomy 24:17-22

Artist Statement | Rev. Nicolette Faison

They keep taking my neighbors. Chicago and other cities associated with the Democratic party are going through a humanitarian crisis under a fascist regime. Cars are being left vacant on random blocks and parking lots. People are being disappeared while their children are being zip-tied at 3 a.m. We clergy and religious leaders have been shot with pepper spray and rubber bullets while demanding the freedom of our neighbors. No one deserves to live like this. This piece does not truly capture the pain I hold every day, between keeping track of what is happening in Gaza, resisting fascism, and dealing with yet another economic collapse under capitalism.

But let me tell you something good. . . I still believe in humanity. When I watched people in Gaza prepare basic meals to break their fast during Ramadan during a genocide, I saw something good. When local neighbors saw our public vigil for disappeared people and chose to join us for a time of lament, I saw something good. When Colin Kaepernick paid for the independent autopsy of one of the Black men recently lynched,¹⁸ I saw something good. The good is people still choosing to be empathetic and compassionate in times of crisis. That is what Christ calls us to be.

The stranger who enters foreign land is often forced to flee their own home. It is rare for people to risk their entire livelihood and their family for anything other than necessity. For that reason, each portrait has a halo deeming them holy, sacred, and divine. I used sparkling gold paper to break up each distinct image. Look deeply at these portraits. The top left is inspired by the Maasai people, a nomadic group that dwells across borders. The top right image is an indigenous woman and her child, a nod to Mary and Jesus. She has a red palm across her mouth which is a tribute to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and “Two-Spirit” people. The bottom left is a slightly aging man from Mesoamerica. The bottom right is a woman in hijab, which is commonly targeted in Islamophobic spaces. Look at the people some consider to be a threat. Look at our neighbors. Migrants are sacred. Fuera ICE.¹⁹

Look

Look deeply at each portrait. What do you feel as you study each face?

¹⁸ usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2025/09/19/colin-kaepernick-independent-autopsy-trey-reed/86244594007

¹⁹ “Fuera” can be translated to “out” or “away.” ICE is an acronym for the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, which began enacting raids in US cities at the time these resources were created (2025).



Fuera ICE | Nicolette Faison
Acrylic, marker, paper on canvas