

## Sermon – Women’s World Day of Prayer

### Isaiah 11: 1-10 The Alternate Kingdom

#### Mark 10: 13-16

I tuned into small parts of the recent ITV series ‘Humans’ which is a science fiction about artificial life that starts out as a mechanical tool for humanity but where some set out in search of deeper life questions. There’s a little scene there when one of these adult ‘synths’ or robots is sitting in a small girl’s room playing with her. To start with the female robot keeps repeating that she doesn’t know how to play, but the child persists, drawing her into a crazy reality where anything can happen and days and night morph together and plane travel and space travel and time travel are all impossibly possible.

I know that territory, sitting with my daughter and playing dollhouses. Her Disney Princess dolls hang out with tiny lego men and ride dinosaurs and go off to visit the local doctor who is a green plastic frog. We’ve created a tea-shop from an upturned box and a heap of duplo blocks and the tea-shop lady is a very unlikely creation who looks more like a television aerial than the purveyor of cakes and sandwiches.

And before we think indulgently of our own children, grandchildren (or cousins and sisters) and think to ourselves, yes, but they’ll grow out of it. They’re just children; think carefully. Jesus says the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. The keys to the Kingdom of God, the vision, the universe that Jesus lived and breathed and died and rose for, are given to the child-like. What does that mean? Is it just a platitude? A romantic but unrealistic view of childhood – or do we scratch the surface and try to uncover what Jesus is saying?

In another world far away, children live very different lives from my daughter and sons. They turn on a switch and a room is flooded with light, they turn a tap and the bath is flooded with water (you’d worry if it was the other way around!). They have access to health care and education. There are equal opportunities – in the main - for my daughter, compared to my sons. They do not know what poverty is, beyond a vague theory. In other countries, like Cuba, children grow up with a very different sense of what is normality. They have grown up in a country groaning under political and economic sanctions. They live within short distance of the current world super-power but like other nations in the region they are well-acquainted with poverty.

A few years ago I watched with interest as international ballet star Carlos Acosta – described as one of the great male dancers of his generation – talked to Michael Parkinson about his life. Carlos Acosta is a native of Cuba, growing up the youngest of 11 children to an impoverished family in Havana. It’s said he didn’t have a birthday cake until he was 23. This energetic, troubled young man was signed up to a local ballet program by his Father to occupy him and give him some structure and discipline. It changed his life and the child of poverty became an accomplished international star. There’s all kinds of impossible happening there.

When Jesus says the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are childlike, I think about the story of Carlos Acosta, and I think of my daughter’s dollhouse; situations where there is equality, there is hope, there is imagination and wonder.

There is an utter flexibility in Mair’s interpretation of the world – anything can happen, anything is possible. All the toys, whatever their size or shape, whether they are a glamorous princess who turns things into ice, or a plastic pig, are equals. The doll with one leg is treated with the same care as the one in mint condition. And the most precious two objects in the whole room are the grottiest, most worn and destitute looking plush duck and blanky that you can imagine. Imagine if we treated the world’s people like that: the worn and the loved and the shabby. Imagine if we saw the homeless and the poor differently? Imagine if those whose stories are so different from ours could be allowed the same opportunities to belong and to find meaning and hope?

The Jewish Scriptures say that this is the hope of God too. The world we know with all its power and all its certainty and all its material success will be brought to nothing...

*He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth."*

*Then comes the part that reminds me of my daughter's dollhouse:*

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

*<sup>9</sup> They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea."*

Wolves, leopards, lions and adders. These aren't physical animals, they're symbolic of all the sources of power and fear in our world – the voices that dominate. We're told that God will strip the power from them and bring about peace. And isn't that good news? Isn't that good news for the children of Cuba – that anything is possible, that peace will come, that God's heart will go out to the meek of the earth and liberate the poor so they can dance?

We don't grasp hold of that message enough. We resort too quickly to forms of belief and government that uphold our own familiar, comfortable ways. What would it take for us to truly understand that God understands who really gets his Kingdom? When we don't change our ways of living, our ways of thinking; when we don't take just our share but expect others too. When we don't pay fairly for clothes or chocolate or when we close our hearts to refugees and the homeless we're betraying the Kingdom of God vision. We're not acting with that childlike view where anything might be possible – we're just shoring up our interests.

Jesus believed in a world transformed by the grace and love of God. If we love more, if we seek to pray together, to act with compassion, to understand one another and not judge each other, if we work for peace and equality, not sanctions and divisions, then what will we see? We are mothers, daughters, wives and sisters here: we know what power love can affect, we know what a difference it makes to a child to know they are loved, they are seen, that there is a place for them in this life to dream and dance. It's what we want for our children, and it's what the mothers of Cuba want for their children too.

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