

Taking a child . . . he said . . . , “Whoever receives one child such as this . . . receives me . . .” Mark 9:37

Elsewhere in Mark’s Gospel we meet a similar expression: *Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.* And then there is Matthew’s Gospel’s version of the same statement: *Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.* What can Christ mean by those words The Kingdom of God or The Kingdom of Heaven? Where lies this Kingdom of Heaven into which only a child can enter? Well think back to your childhood because if a child can enter the Kingdom of Heaven and, of course, you were once a child, you must at times have stumbled into it back then.

Old age, increasingly bewildered by the disarray of current times, tends to recall those earlier stages of one’s life. And so I remember when – as the Great Depression came to a close - my parents chose to leave the inner city with all its brick, mortar and asphalt (we had two trees on our street of sixty face to face houses) and overnight I found myself in a suburb of some development but where still there were woodlands, abandoned farms with fields gone fallow and fruit trees growing wild; there were rose arbors, creeks, swimming holes – a region reached only by Toonerville trolleys. It was a new world where I could wander wide, discover snakes and jump at the sudden flight of a pheasant . . . a Garden of Eden [on the verge of urbanization]. The Kingdom of Heaven!

Children do have this knack – un-introduced as yet to the lethal silliness of adults – to see things fresh. Maybe it’s because it’s their imaginations more than that enlarged walnut in our craniums that directs their vision. I have mentioned in the past Kenneth Grahame’s stories describing the way a family of British children – appalled at the way adults had to live – found an illustrated story book whose pages in their eyes became three dimensional – where they saw meadows set with flowers, blue and red, like gems and a white road looping up a steep hill crowned with towers, and belfries – and knights riding two by two . . . a ship in port with an odd sort of crow’s-nest at the top . . . *a world wherein a story lay hidden.* Grahame titled that story “The Walls Were Made of Jasper” – like those of St. John’s heavenly Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation descending upon our earth.

May not the Kingdom of Heaven be this very world into which we are born – which can be turned into a hell on earth by adults who have eyes to see but do not see – or are conditioned to see only production lines that transform nature into stuff – useful stuff – but no more pheasants? Old John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) – a poet whom I have quoted before – envied any child who still inhabited that Kingdom of Heaven:

Blessings on thee, little man, / Barefoot boy, with cheek of tan! / . . . With thy red lip,
redder still / Kissed by strawberries on the hill; / With the sunshine on thy face, / . . .
From my heart I give thee joy, — / I was once a barefoot boy! // Prince thou art, — the
grown-up man / Only is republican. / Let the million-dollared ride! / Barefoot, trudging at
his side, / Thou hast more than he can buy / In the reach of ear and eye, — / Outward
sunshine, inward joy: / Blessings on thee, barefoot boy!

Geoff Wood