

A NOTE TO PARENTS

What does Jesus mean by telling his followers to *be like children* instead of jockeying for position like so many jealous, ambitious status-seekers? Everyone knows that children do plenty of just the kind of bickering the disciples must have been doing: “I got there first!” “It’s mine!” “I want the blue one!” “No fair, it’s my turn!” “I won’t play if I have to play with *her*.” This kind of thing is so typical of kids of all ages, starting with the one-year-old who yells “Mine!” and hangs on like grim death, that we call it *childish* or *immature*. So why did Jesus tell them to be more like children? Why didn’t he tell them to *grow up*? Was he simply dealing in sentimental clichés? But that is so unlike what we know of him. Nearly anything he said that looks at first like a cliché, turns out to have an odd twist about it, and to be very much his own.

It is not only the disciples’ bickering that concerns Jesus here; it is the whole matter of his Messiahship. He wants them not only to stop competing with each other for places in the coming Kingdom, but also to understand what that Kingdom is made of. It is not made of power and strength, but of vulnerable love. And here, perhaps, may be where we can learn from our children.

Anna Freud, working with English children during World War II, found that the children who were sent to the countryside to be safe from the bombs suffered many more emotional problems than the ones who remained in London with their families. The nightmare of air raids, as long as the family remained together, was less than the nightmare of separation, even if separation meant physical safety. Children, it appears, need the presence of a loved and trusted person more than anything else—even more than the conviction of being safe from external danger. And of this is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus comes, not to protect and defend us from all risks, as the adults might wish, but to be the loved and trusted Person that the children know they need. We cannot always protect our children. But we can and must receive them in his Name—show them that love, and help them to know the One from whom it comes.

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Year B
PROPER 20
TRACKS 1 and 2

Jesus's friends were arguing about
which of them was the most special
and important. MARK 9:34



Jesus told his friends that he was the Messiah. So they thought that soon he would become king!

They were excited. They were expecting to become rich and famous and powerful.



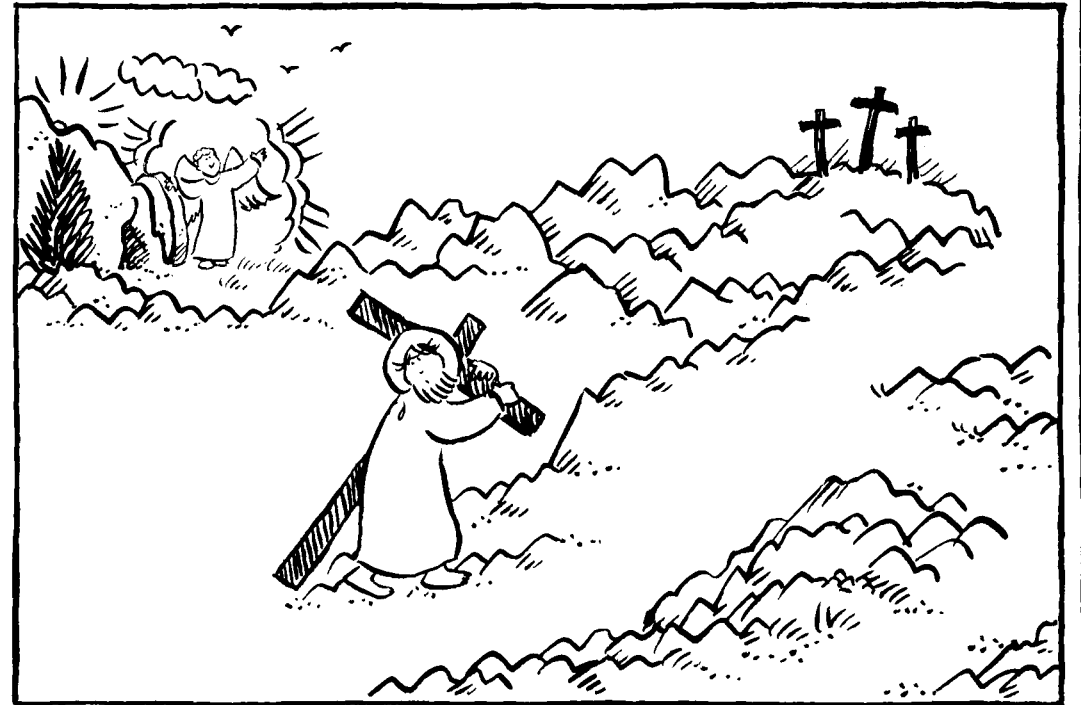
But Jesus said, "I am a different kind of king. I will give up my life, to give new life to God's people."

Jesus said, "Don't try to grab power and be first. My friends need to care for the small and weak."



God's people were waiting for a king to become their leader and scare away their enemies. That's what they wanted Jesus to do.

But Jesus said he had a more important job to do. He needed to show God's love. He needed to give us new life. Then we could learn to be like him. Then God's Kingdom could come, and Jesus could be King for ever and ever.



Draw yourself in the space behind Jesus. Then follow him, first to the cross and then to new life.