

“Whoever receives one such child in my name, receives me...” (Mark 9:37).

Jesus said to welcome those who are like children because then we welcome him.

But, wait? Is Jesus saying that he is “vulnerable”?

That’s what he wants his apostles to understand.

While they are jostling for position and playing who is going to be King of the Hill in the new non-Roman regime, Jesus is wrestling with the reality that his end is near.

Yes, Jesus was vulnerable. He needed those around him to provide what he needed most: The shelter of their loyalty, the nourishment of their confidence, the mantle of their affection. He chose to take a child into his arms because he fully identified with the young one’s vulnerability.

Children then were the most vulnerable members of society. They may have been the apples of their parents’ eyes, but in the eyes of the community they had no standing. Their mothers had more status than they did and we all know that a woman had no status outside of her male family members.

One of the reasons Jesus was in the predicament he was in was that he treated women as if they were human beings in their own right, and not some attachment to a father or husband or brother. Perhaps his encounter with the Syrophenician woman reminded Jesus of what was written of the value of a capable wife in Proverbs: that even the woman should have a share in the fruits of her work and those works should be praised.

But, there's more.

The selection from Proverbs certainly was describing a wealthy woman, possibly a wife or mother of a king. Her dealings in purple fabric, her business acumen, her labor night and day wasn't only for her household or for the forwarding of her husband's or son's standing in the community. She knew that women who were not in her enviable position needed her charity. The wealthy and capable woman understood that her resources were not to be hoarded, but to be shared.

That did not mean that she was relieved of her vulnerability, however. A coup or the capriciousness of a husband could send her and her children begging into the

streets. She and her children would be at the mercy of the kindness of strangers.

Who would welcome them?

Could her charity have been believed to be insurance against her greatest nightmare?

Or, could it be that her diligence was a model for men and women alike to see the necessity of those who find themselves in vulnerable positions?

Baptist pastor H. James Hopkins wrote that the “capable woman” could serve as a model for “capable community”.* The tasks accomplished by the woman in Proverbs are not limited to one individual but must be shared among many. The need for nurture in this world is beyond measure. No one person can do it alone.

We need each other in the care of the hurting, broken, and vulnerable people of this world.

Right now . . .

. . . there are children at our borders who are afraid and confused about the present as well as the future.

. . . Hurricane Florence raged onto the southeastern coastline making thousands homeless and threatening people and wildlife with toxins released from coal ash deposits and other pollutants.

. . . people who have experienced abuse by a friend, or relative, or clergyman, or teacher, are reliving that betrayal every night (or as much as hourly) depending on what news stations you tune to.

. . . Transgendered men and women, as well as their lesbian, gay, and bisexual colleagues continue to experience hateful countenance from their relatives, and many so-called 'loving Christians', to the point that they choose suicide over the pain.

. . . People who move, communicate, learn, and interact differently because of their disabilities find the requirements of living to be a daily challenge.

Jesus could have easily pointed to a person impacted by the recent hurricane, an abused teenager, a South American boy detained in a Texas holding cell, or a young woman with Down's Syndrome. When you welcome one such as this – you welcome me and the one who sent me.

You and I need to be capable members of the Christian faith. We need to work hard to correct the injustices we see every day.

Friends, this isn't about 'resistance', it's about serving Christ on the margins of our privileged lives.

The examples I just mentioned are very general in scope. If we begin to pay attention, vulnerable people who need our love, compassion, and charity may be very close. Very very close.

*H. James Hopkins' homiletical perspective of Proverbs 31:10-31 in *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4*, page 79.