

Jesus Is a Friend of Sinners. This Is Not a Game.

10th Sunday after Trinity (Series 2), August 9, 2026
Stefan Christian Mocanu Jensen. Aarhus and
Copenhagen. Hymns: 690, #1 Psalm 67, 456, 454 //
465, 431, 11.

Matthew 11:16–24

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.” Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Children Who Make the Rules

We all know what it is like to be children. Some of you have children, even grandchildren. So try to think back to when you were a child and played outside or at home. You made the rules for the game. Perhaps it was so long ago that it is difficult to remember. Then think about the last time you were invited to play with a child. They want to play with toy cars, or play house, or perhaps play at running an animal shelter. As long as we play along with the game, everything goes well. But it does not take long before the game is changed, or the rules are changed. Perhaps, sooner or later, you have tried to change the rules yourself. You are the adult, playing a children's game. You quickly learn: *You are not allowed to do that.* The child determines the game. You may even discover that they no longer want to play with you.

The Gospel tells us that this is also how it was in Jesus' day. Listen to what Jesus says: *“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at*

him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”

Who are these children, really? Jesus says, “This generation.” A generation that wants to determine the game. To determine what should be preached, and in that way to define who God is for me. We are part of that generation. I determine who God is for me. I determine how I should live my life and what else I am going to do. In this way, John the Baptist and Jesus become people whose role in my life I get to determine. It is very easy to join in this game. But reality is something else, because we do not dictate who God is. God is God. And he has intervened in our history through John the Baptist.

John the Baptist had a central role in the history of salvation. When we look at great paintings and depictions of John the Baptist, he is standing out in the wilderness. He is dressed in wild clothing, with wild hair, eating wild honey and locusts. But this does not fit into ordinary human life. John becomes too radical, especially because he calls this generation to repentance, a generation that does not think it needs any repentance itself. Therefore, they say, he must have a demon. The man did not eat, he was not socially inclined, and he did not drink either. Yes, John baptized for the forgiveness of sins and pointed to Jesus, who is the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world.

But this generation cannot stand Jesus either. Jesus comes to people where they are. In their joy. At their wedding. Even when the wine runs out, he comes. He drinks with them and

eats with them. Jesus does not come only to what we might call respectable company. He comes to meals with tax collectors and sinners and has fellowship with them. A friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus is not merely an acquaintance. Jesus is the friend of tax collectors and sinners. He really is! Jesus remains our friend forever. A friend who knows us intimately. One who comes close and says what is necessary and uncomfortable, but true. A friend who wants to be with us. A friend who is there in what is difficult. When you are alone, when you have no one to talk to, yes, when everything is falling apart. But Jesus is also a friend in what is joyful. Therefore Jesus can also say of these childish games that wisdom is justified by her deeds. The works he had done confirmed his preaching and showed that it was true.

Jesus' Mighty Works Are the Forgiveness of Sins!

Jesus denounces the cities where most of his works had been done because they did not repent. Three times Jesus says that his mighty works had been done there. We know how important it is that Jesus performs mighty works. John the Baptist was sitting in prison and heard about the works of Christ. Yes, there Jesus was also John's friend, and he said to him: *“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*

These mighty works had been done in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Cities, notably, from which the apostles came. Peter, Andrew, and Philip were from Bethsaida. Matthew, the tax collector, worked in his tax booth in Capernaum. These works point forward to who Jesus is. And this also condemns people today. It condemns us when we want mighty works in our lives. We human beings want the extraordinary. We want to determine the game like children and be entertained.

But What About Today? Are Mighty Works Still Happening Today?

What do you think is a mighty work? Jesus himself says “mighty works” three times. So what do you think is a mighty work? Do you immediately think of supernatural miracles, of the blind seeing and the deaf hearing? Yes, the age of miracles is not over. But we have also begun to play along with the game of this world and the game of our own making. And so we overlook what Jesus tells us is the greatest mighty work.

In Matthew 9, Jesus shows us that there were people who brought a paralytic to him. Jesus knew what he needed. He needed to hear these words: **“Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”** And because we, too, can think that the forgiveness of sins is merely words, Jesus says: **“For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”**

*Then he says to the paralytic: “**Rise, pick up your bed and go home.**” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.*

So the forgiveness of sins is the mighty work that we need, and Jesus forgives us today. Perhaps you do not think that the forgiveness of sins is a mighty work, but rather something insignificant. But with that way of thinking, you have also shown that you have begun to play along with the game that our generation plays. Yes, we do not understand what we have. Jesus has given his Church authority to forgive people's sins. Such a work means that you now have access to God: to pray to him, to come to him in every circumstance, to place your enemies into God's hands, to receive everything that belongs to Christ. Yes, it means that you have Christ as your friend, the one who gave his life so that you might live.

The forgiveness of sins is a mighty work.

The age of miracles is not over. This mighty work is happening even today. The forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to all people. And even today you are told that you are forgiven all your sins. Because Jesus was crucified and fulfilled everything that the Law required. He took our record of debt and nailed it to the cross. It was true then, and it is true today. In just a moment, you will be absolved here at the altar with the laying on of hands. And **that** is what carries you. Christ has said it. Therefore, it is true. **You are forgiven.** Amen.