

Except ye see signs and wonders

Did Jesus mean that all the things we mean by accomplishment, and maturity, and reason, and progress, are actually small niggling things that we must finally shuck and lay aside, in order to again be like children, spiritually open and emotionally naked and constantly liable to giggling?

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [June 8, 2016](#) issue



Crystal Cathedral, the Netherlands

Highlight at church yesterday: a small boy, age four or so, crawling ever so deftly and silently out of the front rows, and getting all the way to the edge of the proscenium, and then getting both arms and one leg up on the ceremonial ledge, before he was hauled back to base, giggling so infectiously that everyone in the

front rows and the celebrant started laughing too. Even the piano player was snickering, and she is usually the soul of stern decorum.

That the perambulator had, I kid you not, a bright blue Mohawk haircut, and was wearing blue pajamas with black cowboy boots, added to the pleasure of the moment, because you hardly ever see anyone at church wearing pajamas with cowboy boots, not to mention such a rakish haircut. But it was his giggle that got to me, and has stayed with me happily this morning. His giggles were utterly and completely and totally artless. They were not wry comments, or default nervous tics, or conscious efforts to deflate tension, or even the evidence of skepticism suddenly flushed out into the open, as giggles sometimes are. No: they were pure merriment, and they pealed, they rang, they chimed, they pierced the moment and peeled away the normal for an instant, and everyone burst out laughing, and I am fascinated and moved by this, and wish to explore it a bit with you, because isn't his giggling somehow a more naked holy thing than a church service? Isn't it? Somehow, in ways that are hard to articulate?

Let the children come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said that, he spoke that clear and adamant and inarguable, with none to gainsay him, and very rarely indeed, I would guess, did he say something he was not sure of with every fiber of his inexplicable being. Of children is heaven, in children is heaven, to be like children is heaven, what could that most mysterious Arab Jew mean by this?

Not simplicity, for children are anything but simple, as every parent knows. Not brevity of height or paucity of muscle and money, for we know that might is not at all right, and to be rich is to be penniless in the stuff of holiness; Jesus said that too, blunt and clear as always, and adding the image of moaning camels trying to stuff themselves through the eyes of protesting needles so that we would never forget what he said.

Did he mean because they are artless, and have no agendas, no end games, no filters and disguises, no masks and shields to hide behind? Was he hinting that their unadorned speech and untrammelled curiosity are shining paths for us to return to? Did he mean that all the things we mean by accomplishment, and maturity, and reason, and progress, are actually small niggling things that we must finally shuck and lay aside, in order to again be like children, spiritually open and emotionally naked and constantly liable to giggling?

I think so. I am not sure he meant that we should all have blue Mohawks and blue pajamas and black cowboy boots in order to be like unto children, although perhaps he did; you can never be quite sure of his wry wit, and it is entirely possible that the boy I heard yesterday morning was indeed a great sign unto the people, and I am the one chosen to perceive him, and report thereof to you. Who can account the ways of the Lord, who himself came into this world as a rotund child, giggling when his mother and father tickled him, and surely making all and sundry within earshot giggle also? Which in some remarkable and mysterious way he still does; and I report this fact to you, so that we can ponder it the rest of the day, grinning widely at the thought of the Lord of the Starfields with a crisp blue Mohawk and black cowboy boots, giggling to beat the band. Remember: except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.