

“Let the Children Come”
Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Romans 12:3-8;
Luke 2:38-52; Mark 10:13-16

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When you think about children, they are wonderful. The joy that they show, the focus they have in the midst of their play—there’s something pure about that. It’s just wonderful. As we begin to think about how God invites us to care for his children, to teach them, to recite to them the nature of God—God is God alone; God is one—and then the idea to love God with heart, mind and might.

Even Jesus, as he grows, takes part in that learning process. As I was reading through that scripture about him remaining behind in Jerusalem I kept thinking, if I were his parent I wouldn’t have said things quite the same way. “You caused us great anxiety.” That’s pretty gentle. And yet, we recognize the need he had to spend time learning, to hear recited the nature of God, to be reminded to love God with his heart, mind, and might. So we think about Jesus in the temple, taking part in the education process.

We continue to have people who are those teachers, and there is a way that when you teach Sunday School you have a superpower. We often think of people with superpowers as people like Superman or some of those other Marvel folks. But think about what power there is in teaching children.

I’m always surprised at how often I confront the way I grew up. Here I am, 58 years old, and yet I continue to react to things the way I learned to react as a child. I’m a youngest child, so I learned to just go with the flow. I recognize how often that’s just my first response, because that’s what I learned as a child. What we learn as children impacts the rest of our lives. You don’t think Sunday School teachers have superpowers?

The truth of the matter is, we go through all this schooling and sometimes it doesn’t feel like that takes as much. It’s partly because I think we struggle with facts and our lives are about a story. We create a story, a way of understanding our life, and those who help us understand that story understand how we live in it, what it is, how we react, how we strategize to accomplish things. That becomes part of who we are.

So it is wonderful to think about children. It would be fun just to look at pictures of children because they are so wonderful. And it’s also wonderful to think about ourselves as children because God has called us children. We are children of God. We are ALL children of God.

As we think about us all being children of God, I couldn’t help but think about how, if we want to be those who help our children know the wonder of God, we don’t take those children and rip them out of their culture because their parents did something that wasn’t legal. If we want to show them the love of God, if we want to invite those

children to know Jesus, if we want to be part of Jesus's calling the children to let them come, we've got to think beyond just the children in our pews to children in our nation and perhaps children in our world. Because we are all the children of God.

Some people suggest that all people are not children of God and I can't let that go because I don't think that's scriptural. I mean, if people who do not believe are not children of God it doesn't make any sense. Why would Jesus talk about going after the lost sheep or the lost coin, or why does the father still love the prodigal son? The cultural thing to do was to have said, "He's no longer my child." But the father waits and watches with hope. The child may not realize he's the child, but the father never forgets and waits for that moment when he can embrace his son again. That's the kind of God we're dealing with—the kind of God who doesn't forget who are his, and we are all his.

In many ways, I wish I could end the sermon right there, but for me in this present time, it feels hard to end right there. While we are all children of God, no matter what race, no matter where we live, it becomes hard for me to figure out what to do. I again return to the schema: Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one. That's what we need to teach our children. I feel like that's the sermon—that we need to teach our children, and we're going to do that through the gifts of our teachers and we're going to do that as we care for the children of the world, but I'm struggling. I'm struggling with looking at the world we live in and the disasters I see and wondering how I deal with that, what I teach, because it feels to me like so much of what I've learned is simply to be Icarus—what I call human hubris—to think that we can solve it all, that we're in charge. Who is in control? Who gets to click through reality? So often I think I do. Or if I think that I'm not in charge, then I think that God must be doing it all. So either I'm in complete control, which I really like, or God's in complete control, which I also like because that's a way of letting go, and where's my responsibility then?

I'm going to suggest we're in between, and it's not quite that easy. You see, I think God has given us lots of parameters. Here's an easy one for me to think about: $E=mc^2$. (That's *not* energy = milk + coffee.) We know those physical parameters. I'm going to suggest that it's not just God giving us physical parameters. There are all kinds of parameters God gives us. He gives us a world in which there are parameters and if we go the wrong direction, if we don't listen, we can end up going in ways we don't want to go. It's not that God is gone. The image I have is more of a father watching children play. He may call out with instructions and guidance, and may even step in at times. But for the most part he lets the children play, live. And what is it so often that we hear Jesus inviting us to do? To live into our lives and—we went through this over the summer—to follow his way. God invites us to make our own choices, to be his people. He invites us to live our lives.

How we live our lives has consequences. When I was a young parent, I took a class that suggested that we think about the consequences for our children. To help teach them consequences, there are natural consequences and there are logical consequences. Sometimes you have to show them the logical consequence of their

action and sometimes you can let the natural consequence happen if it's not too serious.

So where we decide to go with our lives matters. If we listen to how God is guiding us, I think it matters. I don't want to end up at the top of a waterfall unexpectedly. I'd like to follow God into the kingdom and into the life he has for us.

And yet there are ways I feel like I am at the top of a waterfall. There are ways it feels like the world is on the brink of the waterfall. It wasn't just the smoke. That was enough to make me feel weird for the month of August. But it's all the things going on. It's the human disasters that we create, like trying to uproot 800,000 children, or the wars that go on in Syria and that region, or the famine that's going on in Africa. A lot of that feels like it's human-caused. And all of a sudden it feels like we're making matters worse. I sometimes end up a little confused as to what to do, especially when I think about this: what do we teach our children? What do we do?

I go back to "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one." I have to recognize my own hubris, my own way of getting my head too big, my own way of not listening, my own way that I create the world in my image rather than God's image. And I know I do it. When it comes to a time like now, I wish that I could just grab hold of that tin can with its line all the way to heaven, but maybe I don't even need to do that because God is already with us, teaching us that if we really want to make things better, we come together. By coming together and following Christ, we lift up the new life that God would give us.

Romans suggests that we come to faith by hearing the word of God. It is as we recite the shema, we hear the word of God. As we show love to one another, as we come together in our concern, as we try to hold up the new life God would give us, as we recognize the struggles of our world, we hold on to God and see where he might lead us. It keeps coming back to me that it's about coming in humility, letting go of what I think I know, allowing Christ to transform me that I might be led into new life. But I don't think our world is doing that. It's up to us to do that, together. Amen.