

SERMON "More Than A Simple Blessing"

Reverend Lisa Eleck

Olivet Congregational Church

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SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 3.14-17

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Mark 10: 13-16

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

SERMON More Than A Simple Blessing

Jesus took little children into his arms and blessed them. I have seen artists' versions of that scene, Jesus holding a child on his lap and others children standing around him or climbing over him. They're painted on Sunday school classroom walls, in coloring books, and in paintings from across the ages. I even bought my daughter a First Communion plate that sits in a stand of a child snuggling against Jesus shoulder with Jesus' arms wrapped around him and other children huddled close. Truth be told, I loved that plate and bought one for myself. The passage even reminds me of a song that was popular in 1960's and 70's, "Everything is Beautiful by Ray Stevens". It begins with children singing

“Jesus loves the little children, all the little children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.” I think the first verse of that song and our images of children in Jesus’ lap go hand in hand. The images are comforting and perhaps make us smile.

But, Jesus telling his disciples to let the children come to him and picking up a child does not fit with everyday life in Jesus’ time. Childhood then was vastly different from childhood today. After all, we see children differently today. We put children on a pedestal. We love our children and want the best for them and sometimes that includes being pressured to shower them with more and more things. Advertisers know those pressures and take advantage of them. They spend \$17 billion per year marketing food, toys, and merchandise to children.

Does anyone recall the saying, “children should be seen and not heard.”? I remember my father saying it. It was common when I was growing up. I don’t know if it was common during Jesus time, but the sentiment would have been there. If you recall the scripture story about Jesus feeding the crowd of 5000, we hear that Jesus fed five thousand men, but we also hear, “besides women and children.” Women and children weren’t counted. They didn’t count.

In Jesus’ day, children were considered property of their father. In fact the word child is very close to the word slave in Aramaic. I am not saying that children were unloved. Parents loved their children but children did not have value for the family until they were old enough to work. In fact, if there was a fire in a home and the father could rescue only one person – his mother, his father, his wife, or his child. Well, he would be expected to rescue his father. Not his mother. Not his wife. Not his child.

So for Jesus to chastise his disciples for turning away the parents who wanted their children blessed, well, Jesus would be doing the unheard of. For Jesus to bring children to himself and tell his disciples “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” would be setting the culture of the day on its head. Jesus blessed children and used them, perhaps because of

their innocence or because of their acceptance of others or because of their vulnerability, as an example of how one should live to enter the kingdom.

Additionally, in Luke's gospel, Jesus used a child as an example of the one who was to be welcomed. In Luke, the disciples had been arguing over which one of them was the greatest. When Jesus heard their arguing, Jesus "took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.'

Jesus used children as an example of whom his followers should welcome - those who were not important in society. Jesus was not about welcoming important people. He was about welcoming those who had no status, who were vulnerable, who were outcasts, those whom society had no use for. Children were among the ones who had no status, no importance in society. So Jesus disciples are called to follow in his footsteps to welcome as he would welcome.

Despite the money spent by advertisers, despite the fact that we give great value to childhood, vulnerable children still exist today, right here in the United States. There are children who suffer from food insecurity – who rely on school meals during the school year and food programs for food during the summer. Some children lack access to affordable health care. On my way to church Monday morning I was listening to the radio and a discussion about the Inflation Reduction Act that was passed by the Senate. While it caps the cost of insulin under Medicare, it does not cap the cost under private insurance. The segment of the bill that would have capped the cost of insulin under private insurance was removed from the bill. The radio piece included an interview with a woman whose son is on insulin. She has had to choose between paying for the insulin and paying their electric bill. One month, their electricity was even turned off.

And then there are children whose parents are unable to safely and lovingly parent them. Those children, as you know, sometimes enter the foster care system and are welcomed into homes by individuals, by strangers who want to take a child into their arms, their homes, their families and their lives; who want

to make a positive difference in the life of a child whose life has not been easy. Maybe the child will someday be adopted or maybe the child will someday return to his or her biological parent. But in the meantime, they are cared for in their foster family.

Vulnerable children still exist; but so do individuals, families or organizations that want to make their lives better – who want to lovingly support and care for them.

And while the start of the school year can be exciting, not all children or foster families can afford new backpacks with school supplies. So today we are supporting those children and families as we continue our tradition of providing backpacks for vulnerable children through Covenant to Care; backpacks filled with what children need for school – pencils, notebooks, folders, crayons, erasers, colored pencils, sharpeners, hand sanitizers and even tissue.

Jesus put his hands on children and blessed them. He used children, the vulnerable, the weak, the powerless in society, as an example of who we are called to welcome. And Jesus said that when we welcome them we welcome him and his Father. When we welcome children, when we welcome the vulnerable; we welcome God into our midst.

Jesus' taking children to himself runs so much deeper than a beautiful painting or an uplifting song. It challenges us to be like Jesus who invited children to himself to bless them. As the body of Christ, as the eyes, the heart, and the hands of Jesus, we are called to see the vulnerable in our midst, especially the children. We are called to bless them, to be a blessing for them.

So, let us fill backpacks with school supplies and then offer a prayer of blessing for the start of this school year.

YouTube Ray Stevens Everything is Beautiful · 7/27/2011
· 162,000+ views

