

Sermon – “You Are a Child of God”
Sunday, June 21, 2015
Scripture Readings – Psalm 8, Luke 18:9-17
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Psalm 8 is a song of praise. In it, the poet meditates upon the grandeur of the night sky and human seemingly insignificant in comparison with it. But the speaker’s faith reminds him that humans are made in God’s image. The psalmist remembers that men, women, and children are a part of God’s creation and beloved by God. Listen for the Word of the Lord to you:

1 O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. 2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; 4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? 5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. 6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, 7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. 9 O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! The Word of the Lord.

Our gospel reading for today is from Luke, chapter 18, verses 9-17. Here, we hear of Jesus teaching about humility. While he is teaching, the disciples tell mothers that are trying to come to Jesus with their children that they are not to be disturbed. But our Lord rebukes the disciples who are pushing the mothers and their children away and invites the children to him. Listen for the Word of the Lord to you:

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." 15 People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. 16 But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 17 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." This is the Word of the Lord.

The title of the sermon – “You Are a Child of God”

The text: “But Jesus called for them and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.’” Luke 18:16

Let us pray: Gracious God, may the words of my mouth and meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Amen.

This past week the church was full of children. And I can't say it enough, thank you to all those who helped make Vacation Bible School an amazing week. Thirty wonderful volunteers were a part of helping children come learn about Jesus, play games, share snacks, make art, and sing songs. We even got to pet a live sheep at the end of the week!

Today in the scripture reading, you may not have recognized it—but we heard about the FIRST Vacation Bible School. Well—or at least the first documented time children were called together to learn about Jesus... and the leader of the first VBS was Jesus. “Let the children come to me!” Jesus tells his disciples, “don't stop them!” Now the scripture doesn't go on to say in detail what they did together. Maybe Jesus sang with the children, maybe he told them stories, maybe they played a game or ate a snack of fish and bread together... Or maybe they just shared a good hug. But one thing is for certain, Jesus made space for the children and made sure that everyone knew he thought they were important. He rebuked the disciples that were standing in the way because Jesus loves children. No scholars debate this. No long exegetical papers needed. Jesus is setting an example for those listening to him, then and NOW. So if you ever feel stumped about Jesus, wondering what he would do, or how to live like him—be an advocate for children. Be an advocate for our young ones like Jesus.

Did you ever have an advocate for you as a child? I had many. On Father's day we remember our dads who stood up for us—or perhaps this is a day where the absence or loss of an earthly father is more present in our minds.

At the start of each of our lives, we have adults that care for us: fathers and mothers, grandparents, teachers, pastors. Intergenerational relationships are critical to our growth. The way that God designed creation has humanity dependent on adults for a long time. A sea turtle lays eggs in the sand then swims away... leaving her young to fend for themselves at birth. Not humans. We really can't do anything without adults helping us when we are born and that dependence continues for years! We need advocates to grow up. We need someone who looks out for us and speaks out for us. And we need to follow Jesus' divine example by supporting our children as individuals, in our churches, and in our communities.

What can you do as an individual for the young? Advocating for the children looks different for each of us. What does this look like for you? There are simple steps we can do every day to support children. Perhaps it is supporting children's programs, or being a voice for children in political policies, or supporting missions that give to children like bringing backpacks to church for Contact Ministries. And there are lifelong commitments to children. Perhaps it looks like forming a deep relationship with a child, listening, teaching, playing, singing... And I am not JUST talking to the adults right now. To those of you who are young, you too should speak for the children, for your friends, the kids you go to school with, and for those you will one day be adults for. It is too easy to be dismissive or mean and to act like the disciples in Luke 18 that put a block up instead of spreading love and grace.

Being an advocate like Jesus means pointing out what is WRONG in a situation and doing something to change it with love. It was wrong that the children were kept away from Jesus, so he spoke up to create a change.

Being a voice of peace and support for the children of our world takes many forms, and we all are called to do it. We are called to do it not just for our own children, but for other people's children as well, and for or all the children of God. When I look around Westminster I see supportive relationships happening with the Sunday school teachers that take time and energy. I see Confirmation mentors that meet with teenagers who are making the faith their own. I see VBS volunteers, knitters making tiny mittens, and teenagers that play and laugh with children younger than them. These are just a few examples that create space for people to develop meaningful intergenerational relationships that transform us into advocates for the young. Relationships where we laugh together, have to apologize to each other, and learn about God's love together. We probably can't even remember all the adults in our own lives that have helped us grow!

As the children sang, "Jesus said, let all the children come to me, come to me—Don't stop them—for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Do not stop them, do not hinder the children. And there is SO MUCH that does hurt our children in the world. Too much that if you actually remember all the pain in the world that children face you may stop breathing for a moment.

We need to speak up for the children in our world, to point out the WRONG in a situation, and then do something to change it. We need to remember the children that are injured and left orphaned by war. We need to bring peace to this world for them! No schools or churches should ever be attacked. No child should have to fear gun violence or be scared to walk the streets. That happens across the ocean, but also here, in our backyards. We need to remember that even one child without food and shelter is too many. We must find ways to end hunger and provide shelter. We need to remember the children that are facing violence or neglect from those that are supposed to care for them and change their environments. We need to remember that we are leaving this world to our children. We can't trash it and use all its resources so that our children are left with poison.

We have a responsibility to be advocates for children.

The Reverend Sharonda Coleman-Singleton was an advocate for children. This week she fell victim to a hate crime in the church shooting in Charleston. She was a mother of three, a track coach, a teacher, and a minister. The Goose Creek principal Jimmy Huskey praised Rev. Coleman-Singleton saying, "She cared about her students and was an advocate for them, always willing to listen to and talk with them. She was always there with a smile and ready to help." This woman gave so much to children and taught her own children about God's grace. When her son, Chris Singleton was interviewed about the loss of his mother he made it clear that he and his family were going to forgive. He is quoted saying, "We forgive. That is one thing we are going to do."

This young man's resolve to forgive echoes the teachings of Jesus so completely it is world-changing. There is a light in the darkness. "[My mom] loved everybody with all her heart. Love

is always stronger than hate. So if we just loved the way my mom would, then the hate won't be anywhere close to what love is," he said at a press conference.

Chris Singleton, a college student grieving for his mother, is a voice of hope and forgiveness in the face of tragedy because of what his mother taught him about God. I hope to teach my own son the way that the Reverend Coleman-Singleton taught her son Chris. We often see things that are wrong – violence, racism, greed. These are blocks that threaten love and faith. These are blocks that are trying to keep us from feeling the hope and love of God.

This week at Vacation Bible School the children had time to share some of the things they learned. They would come up on the stage, get to speak into the microphone and say something learned that day. For example, "I learned a new song or I learned about being a disciple." And one child told me, "I learned that I am a child of God." Yes, you are—we all are. This lesson is one that spurs us to live out a life that spreads love, not hate. We are all children of God and Jesus is our advocate. Jesus calls us to him even when despair stands in the way. He wants us to know that the grace of God's love is a free gift for ALL that can transform even the darkest wounds in our world. You are a child of God, no matter your age, and Jesus is your advocate. He is calling you, claiming you, and this is good news we can share—we must share because our world is hurting and in need of a transforming grace.

As Jesus is your advocate, be the advocate for others. Amen.