



“Jesus Loves the Little Children”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

16 "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon'; 19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Sermon:

I am a grandma now, so I have moved closer to the world of little children, again. For a while, I knew about teenagers, and then college-aged smarty-pants, and restless young adults all primed to go out and change the world! Now I am back in the world of the little ones.

As my little granddaughters grow, I am back in the world of their imaginative play, once again. Saviah is just starting to play games like “wash the deeshes” with a big bowl of water

and suds, standing in front of my kitchen sink on a step stool. Or “feed the thirsty plants” dragging my hose around the garden and hosing down the plants, me and herself! The “children sitting in the marketplace” are not unlike my toddler grandchildren. Maybe a few years older...pretending to play “wedding party” and pretending to play “funeral procession”. But like young children, they can’t agree what to play together so they end up yelling at one another and sulking, cause they only want to do what they want to do, and they can’t agree on what to do!

But these are not children Jesus is scolding, it is the leadership of the Jewish people. They don’t like John because his message is severe, and he looks and acts like a prophet out of the past, yelling at people to repent or perish. He is the “funeral procession game” that they don’t want to play. They don’t like Jesus because he is welcoming and inclusive to all and sits down to eat and drink with outsiders and outcasts and the socially disreputable. Jesus is the “wedding party” game that they can’t agree to play.

Like petulant children, the leadership of the day is not concerned with loving God and neighbor. Not a bit. Like children at their worst, they are selfish and self-absorbed, unwilling to cooperate. Problem is they are not children! Jesus can’t put them on a “time out”!

They are wasting their time and energy on endless, petty argument and ignoring the suffering of the people, and the call to new life and a world transformed, in the Kingdom of God. Their childish behavior is not adult at all, though it is seen among the leadership elites of the people!

So Jesus acknowledges that it is not the smart ones, the educated ones who are responding to his call to enter the new life of God...it is the “babies”, the “infants”, the “simple” ones.

Not toddlers or teens, but newborns.
The weak, the dependent, the vulnerable, the open. Babies.

This is just not easy to hear. There is nothing this world recognizes more than self-determination, authority, power and control.

Babies are incapable of any of this.
Babies depend on their lovableness to keep them alive.
They depend on being precious, and that their very fragility will open our hearts and cause us to fall in love with them.

Can you see yourself this way? As precious and fragile? Beloved because you are adorable, yet dependent and helpless?

And then Jesus adds another image, of heavy burdens. Who here does not have days or weeks or months or years of heavy burdens?

But Jesus is not a burdener. He is the one who says, lay your burden down, rest, rest, rest. You are adorable and precious and you don't need to carry heavy burdens. God cradles you like a beloved baby, so rest, rest, rest.

- We have nursery providers because we want to give parents a rest, rest, rest.
- And we have uplifting worship and music so your heart can rest, rest, rest.
- We strive to be welcoming and inclusive to everyone who enters our doors because we know how weary we can be, how sad or lonely, or scared of church people you can be, and we want you to lay down that burden and rest, rest, rest.

Jesus repeatedly used the most intimate language of father and child, parent and child, to clarify how God acts, loves, and responds to us.

Could Jesus have known about ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences)...the area of social science that everyone is talking about these days? ACES refer to the hurting and harming of childhood, trauma that is reflected much later in an adult's life.

Childhood damage of physical and/or emotional abuse, neglect, divorce, addiction and many other woes...it turns out that they adversely affect the life of the adult this child becomes.

Addiction, sickness of every kind are in higher incidence with children (now adults) who have suffered from adverse childhood experiences.

Could Jesus have known about how the children suffer? And that all of us, grown up or not, need a certain kind of "parent", someone who loves and cherishes us no matter what?

Even if, in life, we did not have a parent like that.

Jesus assures us that we can be the babies in need of deep treasuring, of love and care and cherishing.

We can sit in the lap of God, (as the psalmist has written) and be safe and at peace.

We can trust in God to care, to love, to ease our hearts and our burdens.

Scientists are discovering that Adverse Childhood Experiences are lamentably common. And disrupt lives very profoundly.

But social scientists are also discovering that children and adults can rebound from the hurts, they can grow stronger, and heal, too. They are resilient.

From medicine, to experiences of joy and creativity; children and adults can heal. From painting to kayaking, to theatre, to therapy...from antidepressants and anti-anxiety medicines to learning forgiveness and self-care and art and crochet...we can heal. Communities of love and care help heal terrible hurts...

Jesus is a healer.

He knew.

He knew we were broken, often at the hands of other people.

He knew we were suffering, and that suffering came at the hands of other people.

He assures us that we are precious, beloved, and capable of being free of the heavy burdens that others place on us.

No heavy burdens. A light weight to carry, an easy yoke. Not a huge one.

He does not magically make burdens disappear, but he does assure us, as we know from those who heal from their Adverse Childhood Experiences, that the burdens of the past need not cripple the adult of now.

It can be carried lightly.

And into this day, and into tomorrow, there is hope and possibility, and strength and courage.

Jesus healed many. He created welcoming, nurturing communities to help heal.

His example stands before us.

He reminds us that it is possible to be healed, to be like the joyous infant; knowing we are loved and we are safe, we are valued and we are precious. It is possible to grow up strong and resilient and joyful, even after the hurting.

This is possible.

This is hope for tomorrow.

This is what it means to be “a child of God” and “siblings in Christ”...living into our healing and our joy. Being strong and loving and healing communities. This is our call.

Alleluia!