

“FAITH OF A CHILD”
Karen F. Bunnell
Elkton United Methodist Church
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Luke 18:9-17

Back when I was in seminary, around 1986, a book came out that flew to the top of the best seller lists. It was by a man named Robert Fulghum and it was entitled *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Some of you probably remember that book, and may still have it on your bookshelf. It's a classic.

For those of you who don't know about it, Fulghum starts off his book by saying that literally, all he needed to know in life he learned in kindergarten, and he then offered a list of those things. It went like this:

Share everything.
Play fair.
Don't hit people.
Put things back where you found them.
Clean up your own mess.
Don't take things that aren't your's.
Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
Wash your hands before you eat.
Flush.
Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint
and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
Take a nap every afternoon.
When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands,
and stick together.
Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup:
The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really
knows how or why, but we are all like that.
Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the
Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.
And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you
learned - the biggest word of all - LOOK.

(Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned*)

in Kindergarten, p. 6)

Pretty good list, isn't it? Fulghum is right - all of those things that they taught you in kindergarten hold you in good stead all of your life. Basic, simple, common sense ways to live life. He's sums it up really well in that nice little list.

In much the same way, Jesus sums up the life of faith in a nice little way in today's Gospel lesson. He says, "Have faith like a child." Just like that. Have faith like a child. So this morning we're going to spend a little time together looking more closely at the faith of children. And we're going to start in a very special way.

We're going to hear from some of our children. A couple of months ago, I enlisted Sarah Buckley's help, and she went to some of our Sunday School classrooms to videotape some of our children and get their thoughts on the things of faith.

Enjoy - (video)

Wasn't that sweet? Isn't it dear to see those kids talk about faith? Is it any wonder that when the disciples were trying to keep the children away, Jesus objected and instead, drew them in? No doubt He was simply delighted to have them around, because of the completely trusting, vulnerable and joyous faith they displayed.

You know what I mean. Children are completely trusting when it comes to faith. You heard the kids in the video. They knew what Jesus looks like (or at least one was certain that none of us really know what he looks like - pretty smart, wouldn't you say?), they knew who Jesus was, and what He does for us. I mean doesn't it make sense that one of them said Jesus wears a cape? Who else wears a cape? Super-heroes. People who can do anything, who can leap tall buildings, who can swoop in and save us, people who are strong, people who are heroes. What better way for a child to think about Jesus, or for us to think about Him, for that matter?

A child knows Jesus is God's son, He was born in a manger, He had disciples, He performed miracles, He died on a cross, and He rose on Easter Sunday. It's black and white for them. He is Lord. Period. End of discussion.

A child hasn't gotten to the point of many adults where they are always questioning, who is Jesus, and what does He mean for my life? A child, most often, thankfully, hasn't had disappointments or heartaches that cause him/her to question who Jesus is. For most children, Jesus is God's Son, the Lord, who takes care of them. It's as simple as that. They know that, and are sure of it.

One day, a pastor was walking down the hall of his church and he came upon little Susie who was standing in her Sunday School room door waiting for her parents to come and get her. The pastor noticed that she had her SS leaflet in her hand, and on it was a picture of Jonah and the whale, the lesson for the day. So he knelt down next to her, and asked about what she had learned that day. And Susie told him - all about how the whale swallowed Jonah but he didn't die, and so on. The pastor decided to press her a little about it. "Do you really believe that happened?" he said. "Of course I do!" she replied. "Really? A man can be swallowed by a whale, stay inside its body, and then come out alive? Really?" Susie said again, "Of course!" And then she added, "The story is in the Bible and we studied it in Sunday School today, so it has to be true!"

Figuring he was dealing with a pretty savvy little girl, the pastor went on. "Well, can you prove to me that the story is true?" Susie thought for a moment, and then said, "Well, when I get to heaven, I'll ask Jonah!" Pretty quick thinking, huh? The pastor replied, "Well, what if Jonah's not in heaven?" Little Susie put her hands on her hips and sternly declared, "Then YOU can ask him!" (On-line, sermonillustrator.org)

For kids, it's true because the Bible tells them so. Period. Their faith is marked by certainty, untainted by the doubts and struggling with faith that comes with age.

Secondly, the faith of a child is marked by spontaneity and joy. It bubbles up from them. Did you see the children singing "The Lord's Army" last Sunday in worship? They couldn't stand still!

Children's lives are a great journey of discovery after discovery, and it fills them with joy. I've talked at times here about my memories of Sunday School here and in other churches as a child. Hearing about Jesus making a blind man see, or Jesus walking on water, or making a miniature house out of a cardboard box to show how the friends brought the paralyzed man to Jesus. Every story is like opening up a new present!

And when kids discover something it fills them with joy and it comes out in their living! They're not afraid of letting their feelings show, like so many adults are. They just lay it out for all the world to see. Too many of us live life cautiously as we get older. We don't just "let it all hang out and display our joy!"

When our family went down to the Outer Banks after Easter, I did something that caused me no small amount of teasing by the adults on the trip. I went out on the balcony of the beach house with my two nephews (ages 6 and 11) and blew bubbles. And they were great bubbles, too! It was fabulous. Because we were on

the beach, the wind was blowing in swirls, and the bubbles would fly out and swirl around and shine brightly in the sun, and get caught in the wind, and we'd watch and watch and watch to see how far they would go! It was great when people walking on the ground three stories below us would suddenly discover our bubbles floating down around them! It was fabulous! I blew so many bubbles one day I got dizzy! I blew so many bubbles that both of my nephews finally got bored and went inside - but I kept it up! It was joy for me, pure joy!

When's the last time you blew bubbles, or colored, or just did something for the pure joy of it? I think that's one of the things Jesus most admired about children - was their sheer, pure, unadulterated joy. It's one of the marks of childlike faith - joy.

Thirdly, and maybe the most touching and poignant thing about the faith of children is that they see Jesus as their friend. He's their friend. Plain and simple. Children, early on, don't understand Jesus as their Savior, they see Him as a friend - always there, always taking care of them, always listening when they pray - a friend.

Oh my, how, too often, we get away from that. The older we get, the more we put conditions on our relationship with Jesus. The older we get, the more we start to think we have to earn His love and friendship. We start to buy into the world's thinking about proving ourselves and our worthiness, and we let our sinfulness separate us from our Savior.

Oh, that we could hold on to the childlike faith that Jesus is our friend, no matter what. He loves us, no matter what. He doesn't move any closer or any further away because of how we act, the things we do. Children just know that Jesus is their friend.

I read a poem recently that shows that so beautifully. It's by a man named Wayne Edwards and it's entitled "Someone Stole Baby Jesus" and it goes like this:

Someone stole Baby Jesus from the manger on the lawn,
when the preacher came to church, he found the baby gone.
He said with anger in his sermon that the baby had been taken,
His faith in humankind had certainly been shaken.

After church, still breathing flames, like a literary dragon,
he met Tommy on the sidewalk playing with a new red wagon.
Tommy was so happy it thawed the preacher's heart
but what he saw inside the wagon, gave him quite a start.

"It was you stole Baby Jesus, what an evil thing to do!"

Tommy said, "But Pastor, I thought everybody knew.
I asked Jesus for this wagon," as he patted it with pride.
"I told him if I got it I would let him have first ride!"

(On-line, wayne@familypoet.com)

In the eyes of a child, Jesus is their friend. No wonder Jesus loved to have the children around Him, and no wonder He invites us to have childlike faith - faith that is sure, faith that is joyful, faith that calls Him friend.

So let's stand together and sing what may have been the very first hymn any of us ever sang - Jesus Loves Me - and let's sing it with childlike faith and joy!
May it be so.

Amen.