

Welcome the Children

Isa 54:1-2

Matt 18:5-10

October 11, 2009

This morning we celebrate Children's Sabbath – a yearly program designed to promote awareness of children's needs and our responsibility to meeting their needs as a church. This year's theme is Children First.

Many Children's Sabbath celebrations will focus on health and poverty issues affecting children around the world. These are important areas of concern and needed action. Many times babies, children, and teenagers throughout the world are thrust into circumstances that are not of their own making. It is up to compassionate adults to help meet the needs of children. As Psalm 127 proclaims, "Children are a gift from the Lord." Surely God intends for us to receive this gift with joy.

Matthew 18:5-10 reminds us of the importance and significance of welcoming children:

"... anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me. But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

"Beware that you don't look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father."

Children are precious to Jesus, and ought to be precious to us as well. For when we act in welcoming ways toward children we are being hospitable to the Lord Jesus himself. Why, because just as Jesus does for us what we cannot do ourselves, when we welcome and teach little children about a relationship with the Lord we are doing for them what they cannot do for themselves. Children rely on those older than themselves to impart knowledge. Just as a mother bear teaches her cubs what things are best to eat to satisfy the hunger in their stomachs; you and I have the joy of teaching our children and youth the best thing to satisfy the hunger that is in their soul.

Now, I ask you: Who wouldn't want the joy of showing hospitality to the Lord by welcoming a child or youth? At Sunrise we have many wonderful Sunday School teachers, music teachers, and Youth workers. And, as you know, we have recently hired Audrey Wilder to be our Minister of Children and Youth. Sunrise has always said, "Children – no matter the age – are important to us."

However, I have heard it said in other churches, it is reported by colleagues in their churches, and I have even heard it said in this church: I don't want to teach the children's Sunday School

classes or work with the youth group because I did it when my children were in there and I've done my time.

Done my time?! Friends, Jesus tells us when we welcome children – when we help them to come more fully into his presence – to enter into a deeper relationship with him – either through worship or learning – then we are opening ourselves up to Christ himself. Working with kids is not a jail sentence to which we can say, “I've done my time.” It is a joyful responsibility.

It truly takes a village to raise a Christian child. The Isaiah passage that we read this morning communicates to us that the church, in a mother-like way, has more children than a woman who is bearing biological children. The words of the prophet encourages us to make room in our churches and in our hearts for the young:

"Enlarge your house; build an addition.
Spread out your home, and spare no expense!"

I'm not talking about a literal building project this morning. I think Isaiah is imploring the faithful to enlarge the houses of their hearts and be willing to make whatever sacrifice in order for those who are in need to have.

Friends, children add to worship. In their innocent ways, for example during children's sermons, they give us insight into our own walk with the Lord. Children rely on parents and all of the others adults in the church, no matter the adult's age or experience, to teach them and encourage them in their faith.

I want to ask you this morning to put aside any fears you may have about whether you are spiritually deep enough to answer every possible question that might come up from a young person. Put aside any ideas that you have done your time. Put aside any doubts that God is calling you to be in significant relationship with the young people of this church.

Instead, embrace the young who need you so much. They need your joy, your wisdom, the experience you've gained along your spiritual journey. They need to know that you value them as objects of the love of God. They don't care if you're 28 or 88. (The church has no retirees.)

Let's put children first in the Kingdom of God as we remember that some time ago, another adult put us first so that we could be introduced into a saving relationship with Jesus. If we do, one day the children that surround us will grow up and know they have the joyful responsibility of introducing the children that surround them to their Savior, too.