

“What is Childlike Faith” based on Luke 18:15-17 and Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Delivered by Minister Carol Ann Hoard on May 22, 2022, for Shelby Presbyterian Church online

You may not know these people, but I’m going to rattle off a few names, like Beulah Reynolds. Every time I see Beulah, my mind automatically thinks of a graham cracker. Rachel Costner. To this day, if I smell a saltine cracker, I think of Rachel. Sally Helms. Every time I see a little yellow candy chick, I think of Sally because every time you memorized your verses in Sunday School, you got a chick. And who didn’t want a chick?

Babs Beam, Joy Dellinger, and Frances Beam loaded us up on an old van and took us up to Baltimore, Maryland, so what were they thinking? Then they took that van up to New York City. I still don’t understand them. Sue Tallent, bless her, let us have more slumber parties at her house than I could ever imagine.

These were some of my Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bible School teachers, and youth workers who taught me the stories of the Bible as they connected the story of my life with the story of generations of biblical faith. Through their teaching and their care, faith was imparted to me as I was grounded in the generations of biblical faith and learned about stories such as Ruth, Lydia, David, Shadrack and Meshack and Abednego, Mary and Martha, and the list could go on.

Through their welcoming of me, I learned about Jesus welcoming children to sit with him and they imparted in me, as a child, the faith in Jesus that would take me on to my adult life. Most of them have joined the great cloud of witnesses now who cheer on the generations of faith. It is through the gift of their faith in God that I seek to live with the gift of faith I have received.

Our scripture readings for today are about children – and what a Sunday to talk about children. Today, we celebrate a God who celebrates the child, who celebrates the parent, and who calls us all to raise our children to know and experience the love of God in their lives. We are call by Jesus to embrace the children of this community, to remember our pledge with each and every baptism to raise them with the same hopes, dreams, and love as we would want for our own children, and to reflect the very love and grace of God that we have been so fortunate to experience.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7: “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children.” The faith imparted to our children grounds them in the understanding of these stories of biblical faith and it links them to the generations of faith. Rather than just being remembered as stories about God’s faithfulness in the past, biblical stories of faith link one generation to the next to trust the promise of God’s promise of faithfulness to be with us in the future and now, in this moment, this past week.

We are to talk about our faith with our children. Not just take them to church – which is a good start but model our spirituality for them. Let them see our values and our faith. In verses 7 to 9, the emphasis is on teaching our children. Now, I want you to listen for the action words as you read them. *“Be sure to teach them to your children. Talk about these commands when you sit*

in your house and when you walk on the road. Talk about them when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them on your hands and wear them on your foreheads to help you remember my teachings. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.”

In this passage in Deuteronomy, it seems like a lot of action words – sit, stand walk, talk, here, lie down, get up, do this. It is a lot. If you did these things, it would be your whole life. If you did this when you sit, sand, walk, etc., it would be your whole life. I think that is what the point of that is. If you are constantly speaking of, meditating on these words. Then you will act like it. If you are not thinking about God, that is the easiest time to sin. So, this passage says we should be thinking about God all the time – when we sit, when we walk, when we lie down, when we get up.

We want our children to be people with values – everybody does. We want them to have good values and contributing members of society, but we really want them to know God and to love God with all their hearts, with all their souls and with all their might. We want our children to be people of faith. When we teach our children from an early age, we remind them in every way possible about our faith. We are taught that the faith of a child is realized when children are welcomed in the same way that Jesus is welcomed: “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”

Whenever children are welcomed in the name of Jesus, they teach the present and future generations about what it means to live with faith in Jesus. Jesus saw value in children. They were not just property – they were valued. Now, when my son Will was little, about 10 or 11 years ago, Dylan had invited him to Vacation Bible School and when he got in the car, he said, “Mom, those people loved me to death.” That was here at Shelby Presbyterian Church. So, may we always be a church that loves people like that.

I am amazed at little children. Now, I had never worked with children really until I came to this church. I’m sure if you’re listening to some of the children’s sermons I’ve done, you can tell. You can see I am still learning not to ask so many questions in the Children’s moments! I have had one of the parents at Rainbow Connection where I do chapel on Wednesday mornings say to me that their son reported I had said some bad words – “blood and kill.” I’m learning. I’m learning what stories to tell children and what ones not to.

Children have wonderful and beautiful characteristics and qualities. Characteristics and qualities that life in this sinful world tends to beat out of us. These things like tenderness of conscience, openness about their emotions and feelings, creativity and imagination. Things like wonder and awe, joy, eternal hope, playfulness, and humor. They trust and are easy to forgive. They have undying love, boundless and boundless energy and are always thinking the best about life and other people.

A couple months ago, we were doing Godly Play upstairs and we were doing the story of the Good Samaritan. If you’re not familiar with Godly Play, we have wooden toys upstairs and we act out the stories with them and ask a lot of questions. I’m telling the story about the priest

walking, he looks and turns away, and all of a sudden Kesson says, “Whoa whoa, Mrs. Carol Ann. You mean he didn’t stop and help?” I said, “No, he didn’t.”

I love her being willing to learn and grow. These are the sort of qualities that tend to define children, but they get stripped out of people as they encounter the sin and brokenness of this world. As adults, we sometimes get bored with flowers, lighting bugs, and sunsets. We lose delight in talking with others just about nothing. We become jaded and disinterested. Adults hold grudges, harbor fears, and stay angry. Adults sometimes refuse to forgive. Adults lose hope because our hopes have been dashed and destroyed so many times. Adults do things “because that’s the way they’ve always been done” and have trouble imagining anything different. But children do not behave in any of these ways. Nor did Jesus.

One of the things that attracted people to Jesus is that He was “childlike.” Does this mean He lacked wisdom and understanding? No. Far from it. Jesus was “childlike” because He was full of the wonder of life, the hope for humanity, and the beauty of creation. What is interesting is that in Jesus and in childlike-faith is something that the world would call “naivete.”

He believed things could actually be different. “Let the children come to me,” he said, when others said he didn’t want children near him. He didn’t give one-hundred thousand reasons for why something wouldn’t work.

It has taken a me a little while and I’m not sure I’ll ever fully process Tuesday’s events in Uvalde, Texas. I’m heartbroken. I’m angry. I’m sad. I’m numb and so much more. I’m having a hard time sorting out my feelings right now. Those children did not deserve to be killed and for so many to have their world shattered. No child should ever have to experience that.

When we see a crisis like this, do we have the childlike faith to think that things can change? To believe – make some progress and make a difference. How do we model that for our kids? If we are saying, “Oh this is the way things are now” to shooting at schools, in churches, and at supermarkets. If you’re saying, “This is just the way it is now,” then you are part of the problem.

We must have that childlike faith for our children – To believe things can be different. What is child-like faith? Well, it is believing that things can be better. That is faith! To believe that this is not the way things should be!

Jesus lived in awe of life, awe of God, and awe of humanity. And this awe was contagious. People who saw how Jesus lived began to see how life should be lived. Jesus revealed how God intended life to be lived. In other words, those who begin to live life like Jesus are those who begin to see heaven come down to earth.

This is what Jesus Himself lived, and this is what Jesus invited others to live also. He taught that if you want to experience God’s life in this life (the kingdom of heaven), then you need to become like a little child once again.

“Do you want to enter the Kingdom like a child?”

If so, then ask questions. Lots of questions. But also have fun. Laugh. Play. Imagine. Sing. Dance. Hope. Dream. Forgive. Create. Trust. Live life to the full. Be excited. Be adventuresome. Be tender of heart. And most of all, love.

Children believe they can do anything. Just watch a child on the playground when we are all gasping, wondering if they really think they can do that. And yes, they can. Children believe they can do anything. We have let our life experiences make us pessimistic. Jesus says don't believe this is how it is supposed to be! You can believe that things can be better, and this is what Jesus is talking about in the new creation. He will make all things new.

We are a part of that now – Jesus lived, died and rose for us! So, we could see that sin and death are powerless over us. This is so with faith. We can see things are possible and we can see there is life after this world and that the pain and suffering of this world doesn't have to be this way.

The disciples were rejecting these children because they thought these children had nothing to offer the world, but what the world needs is to be more childlike. We need to believe the world can be better. To listen. I've heard that every young person needs at least 5 adults in their lives (outside of their parents/guardians) whom they trust and count on. It doesn't take a special skill. It simply takes willingness to be present; be consistent; be nonjudgmental; be humble.

Children and young people are not problems to be solved. No matter what age you are, young people need caring Christian adults who are willing to journey with them through the crazy years. I wonder if the 18-year-old gunman had adults he counted on. I wonder if things would've gone differently Tuesday. I don't know for sure, but I think it would've been less likely if he had more caring and trusting adults in his life. People who didn't give up on him when he messed up.

Children are trusting us. They believe we can do something. We just don't need to tell children we are thinking and praying about it, but we need to show them by the prayers and thoughts we are making into our actions. You can do something. Don't wait. You can help raise these children in a community where they feel safe. You can befriend a young person. You can show up. You can teach Sunday School, or be a body in the class room and listen. Be a chaperone on trips (only after background checks). You can be one of the five for a handful of our children and young people.

As Christians we understand that Children are, in fact, part of the family of God. When you live this way, you will become like a little child, and will see God working in your life with childlike faith. May we feel God's presence in our lives as we continue on our own walks of faith. And may we come to know our God who continues to call us to embrace our loving, beautiful identities as children of God! Let it be so! Amen