

Childlike

Scripture: Matthew 18:1-4

September 28, 2014

Midweek Provocative Questions

- What childlike qualities have you lost as you have grown up?
- When was the last time you were truly enthusiastic about your faith and what will it take to become so again?

SERMON POINTS/OUTLINE

- Jesus told the disciples that to be part of the Kingdom of God, one must be childlike.
- In the week's drama from the Iona community, "Jesus" lists childlike qualities as: Curiosity, Enthusiasm, Generosity and Trust.

A Guide for Daily Reading and Meditation

A Prayer for Every Day: God of glory and matchless beauty, whose creativity inspires me and quickens my heart during this season when the leaves are showing hints of the colors that will very soon paint the landscape, I come today, confessing that I am not always aware and alert to your glory and presence in my life. This very day, God, give me the wonder and curiosity of children, and fill me with the kind of enthusiasm for your wonders that only children can teach me. Amen.

SUNDAY – Review the midweek questions in light of today's worship

In light of today's sermon, ask yourself:

- What childlike qualities have you lost as you have grown up?
- When was the last time you were truly enthusiastic about your faith and what will it take to become so again?



MONDAY

Read Matthew 18:1-4¹ (*The Message*)

¹ At about the same time, the disciples came to Jesus asking, "Who gets the highest rank in God's kingdom?"² For an answer Jesus called over a child, whom he stood in the middle of the room, and said, "I'm telling you, once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in."⁴ Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God's kingdom.

Read the scripture 3 times out loud. Each time, ask yourself a new question:

¹ Scriptures found in this document marked *The Message*: originally published by NavPress in English as *THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language* copyright 2002 by Eugene Peterson. All rights reserved. ([The Message Bible Online](http://www.themessagebible.com))

1. What words jump out at me today?
2. What phrase seems to be the most important as I read this passage right now? Why?
3. What does this passage say to me about my life?

Note your thoughts in a journal. If time permits, write a prayer asking God's guidance and help to apply the insights from the passage to your life.



TUESDAY

Today's reading is an excerpt from an article entitled *What Is Child-like Faith* by Mark Ha on the web journal *Revisions* from Princeton University. (Emphasis added is mine.)

There's something to be said for the devotion and certainty in the gospel in which "simple faith" is grounded. Actually, the Bible calls an unbelieving heart sinful (Hebrews 3:12). But that doesn't mean that there shouldn't be further exploration of the gospel. That doesn't mean we should reject intellectual discussion and education. In fact, God says in Hosea 4:6, "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children." If we reject knowledge – reject reading the Bible and reject discussing the scriptures with other Christians to arrive at a deeper understanding – how can we expect to know what God's law commands us to do in different situations? How can we expect to understand the problem with sexual immorality, drunkenness, or dishonesty? ***How can we expect to discern God's voice amongst all the other voices that we hear every day? If we refuse to listen to God's voice and His Word, how can we expect Him to answer our questions?***

1 Corinthians 13:11 presents the child metaphor in a different way: "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me." Understanding the basics of the gospel – summed up in John 3:16 – is crucial to our salvations. But our faith does not end there. God wants us to grow and mature in our faiths, eventually putting our childish ways behind us. He invites us to read His Word, and to ponder deeply about the scriptures, about our lives, and about the significance of our faith in the world today. ***If we are ever content with our understanding of the gospel and the Bible, then we lack a child-like faith.***²

The most vibrant congregations I know of are congregations where there are numerous small groups where adults are engaged in Bible study and share their insights as well as their life

² From *Revisions: A Journal of Christian Perspective*. *What Is a Child-like Faith* by Mark Ha as found at <http://manna.mycpanel.princeton.edu/revisions/2013/03/what-is-child-like-faith/> Copyright 2014 *Revisions*. Permission requested from editor on September 22.

journey with others in the group. They learn from and are inspired by each other to grow spiritually.

While I know that some of the RUMC faith family use this study guide most days, and while there are 4 ongoing groups that meet for study and fellowship, the vast majority of our adult congregation are not involved in a small group.

Today I ask you to pray for our congregation and our growth in faith and spiritual maturity, and if you have some thoughts about this, I'd love for you to share them with me!



WEDNESDAY

Re-read yesterday's excerpt from *Revisions*.

Mr. Ha writes about "simple faith" in terms of trusting God – earlier in the article, he more or less defines that as "complete trust in God." Complete trust isn't always easy or a given, even for the most devout of Christians. Just last Sunday (the week we read the miracle of the silver coin in the mouth of the fish), as I was preaching, I was led to talk about how sometimes we feel like whatever we've been called to do is more difficult – overwhelming, even! – than we ever expected. I remember several times that stand out in my memory, when I was just sure I was not up to the task.

When have you allowed yourself to exercise "simple faith" by completely trusting God? What was the result? How did you feel when you carried through and did what God was calling you to do?

When have you not exercised "simple faith" and went another way?

If you completely trust God today, what's next for you in your walk with God?



THURSDAY

Today's reading is an excerpt from an article entitled *Children: What does it mean to "welcome God's kingdom like a child"?* from the Community of Taizé. (Emphasis is added and is mine.)

But what does it mean to "welcome the kingdom of God like a little child"? In general we take it to mean "to welcome the kingdom of God like a child welcomes it." That corresponds to some other words of Jesus found in Matthew's Gospel: "If you do not change your hearts and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). A child trusts without reflecting. Children cannot live without trusting

those around them. Their trust is not a virtue; it is a vital reality. To encounter God, the best thing we have is our child's heart that is spontaneously open, that dares simply to ask, that wants to be loved.

But the phrase could also mean: "welcome the kingdom of God like you welcome a child." The verb "to welcome" used here has in general the specific meaning of "welcoming someone," as can be seen a few verses later when Jesus speaks of "welcoming a child" (Mark 9:37). In this case, Jesus would be comparing welcoming God's presence to welcoming a child. There is a secret complicity between the kingdom of God and a child.

Welcoming a child means welcoming a promise. A child grows and develops. In the same way, the kingdom of God on earth is never a finished reality but rather a promise, a dynamism and an uncompleted growth process. And children are unpredictable. In the Gospel story, they arrive when they arrive, and in any case not at the right time for the disciples. But Jesus insists that they must be welcomed because they are there. In the same way, we have to welcome God's presence when it presents itself, whether it is the right time or not. We have to play the game. ***Welcoming God's kingdom like we welcome a child means keeping alert and praying so that we can welcome it when it comes, always unexpectedly, whether at an opportune moment or not.***³

What important insight does this article bring to you? What does it have to say to you about your trust in God and welcoming God's activities in your life?



FRIDAY

As this week has focused on our having a childlike faith, take out some crayons and construction paper, if you have it, or just some plain paper. Draw a picture of how God loves you and how you trust God. Maybe it's not so much a picture as symbols that mean something to you. Have fun!

Rev. Vivian C. McCarthy
Reisterstown United Methodist Church
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³ Excerpt from *Children: What does it mean to "Welcome God's kingdom like a child"?* Letter from Taizé 2006. As found at the website of the Community of Taizé -- http://www.taize.fr/en_article3260.html Copyright © Ateliers et Presses de Taizé. Reprinted by permission.