



COMMUNITY
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

MINISTER
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25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Mark 9:30-037

It takes a child to raise a church

Intro: Our reading this morning is from Mark. We hear Jesus predicting his suffering and death and whenever he speaks of his death he always speaks of his resurrection. Once again, the disciples fail to understand, they spend time worrying who is the greatest, so Jesus calls on a child to help them see what really matters. Let us listen for God's word to us.

We have all heard the phrase that reflects African wisdom "It takes a village to raise a child". Within a Christian framework, many go on to suggest that it takes "a church to raise a child". And indeed every time we celebrate infant baptism, we make vows as a congregation to tend to the spiritual upbringing of the child being baptized. We promise to be there for this individual. We promise a future to this child. Today I've turned that phrase around and titled the sermon "It takes a child to raise a church" and before I go on, I am eager to hear what you think this phrase could mean. If there is any merit to that idea, what could it say to us? This part of the sermon depends on dialogue -so please what are your ideas?.....

In our reading today, Jesus gets it that the disciples don't get it. He understands that they have not understood what he has said about following him. Jesus speaks of dying

and living forever, he has said and done unbelievable things and then declared that they would do even greater things. He told Peter that Peter was the rock on which the church would be built. All this has not sunk in. This morning we find the disciples arguing over who is the greatest. Jesus seizes this time as a "teachable moment" and in an effort to find a new way of making sense to them he takes a child in his arms and places the child before them saying "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me". I'm not sure this cleared things up for the disciples. We must wonder and ask what is there in welcoming a child that opens the door of God's kingdom? How can a child help build a community of people into the church, into the body of Christ? We've named many things already. Thank you for your ideas.

I'd like to add some more thoughts based on a comment by Elie Wiesel, the great Jewish scholar and survivor of the Holocaust. He quotes from the rabbinic tradition writing, "I cannot teach you the ten cardinal rules governing the conduct of men wishing to serve the Creator. However, there are three things you can learn from a child....learn how to cry, how to laugh, and how to keep constantly busy."

Cry, laugh, keep busy. How can these traits help build and raise a church? Children know how to cry, and they cry for lots of reasons. A child cries when it is hurt. A child cries when it is angry. There comes a point when adults teach children not to cry, but the kingdom of God is for those who know how to cry, and are willing to admit that they need help or that they hurt. One thing a child knows is that they can not do everything for themselves. They know they need others, and that they are vulnerable and dependent on others. If we don't need others, we don't need God.

To learn how to cry is to learn how to love. To learn how to love is to learn how to be dependent. To learn how to love is to learn and to acknowledge the incompleteness of one's own life and to ask another for help. A child knows this. As we seek to build a church that welcomes a child, we must know this and show this too.

In order to welcome a child we must learn how to laugh. What young person in their right mind would want to spend their precious childhood in a place where people

have forgotten what is funny. A child knows laughter is important because it can change our perspective when things get so serious. Laughter is great defense against arrogance and self-righteousness. Laughter is the reminder that we are not nearly as powerful and as just and as loving as we would like to believe. Children can be a great corrective when we think things has to be just so. One of my favorite comedians, John Lithgow loves to work with kids because they are so honest he says, adults will sit by and clap politely even if he's boring - kids will say Hey mister you're boring! Children remind us that most of our blessings are given to us when we are

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becomes a world of eternity. In joyful playing one steps from time into heaven, where death has no reality and joy and happiness abide... "happily ever after." A child can build up a church, when people relearn how to laugh and play.

Those who have small children know that they have abundant energy. Keeping busy is easy for young ones. God is a builder and needs people to help. Those who come to the kingdom need to be willing to stay busy helping to build the kingdom. A child is constantly engaged in the work of discovery. She is full of curiosity and constantly asking questions as to how things work, why things are as they are, where did this come from? and what do you do with it? The child with grasping hands that reach for everything, with running feet that go everywhere, with an open mouth that will receive and swallow anything new, with climbing, and crawling, and eyes and ears that pick up every word a mother or father ever said, they exhaust us physically and drain us emotionally. They keep us busy.

They keep us mindful that this is a world of mystery to be explored and to be experienced, a puzzle to be checked out, and new horizons to be explored. There are new forms of behavior to be tried out, there are limits to be tested, there are rules to be broken to discover if there is anything beyond the rule. How to keep constantly busy is a quality of being a child.

Jesus does not suggest that we become childlike in our faith to kill our curiosity,

but rather in fact to urge us to be life time workers with him exploring God's realm, to be engaged in a life time of questions and looking for what is next. As a congregation may we help preserve the curiosity of a child, for curiosity is ultimately the expression of our hope that there is meaning and order beneath and behind the chaos and confusion that so often appears before us.

The kingdom of God is for those who receive it like a little child, as a child who keeps busy, keeps asking questions, keeps exploring the world, keeps busy with trying to understand more about how life works and what we are to do to preserve this creation. A Child is one who reminds us that God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace and joy. A child might help us acknowledge that we are not self made nor can we make ourselves. It may bring tears to our eyes to acknowledge that; but we need help, and we will not get into the kingdom of God until we are willing to receive the gift of help and love from others.

We promise a future to our children. We promise to be there as a community of faith. As we seek to be a church that welcomes all, including children. Let us learn from them. Striving not to be childish, but childlike. Amen.