

## **SERMON: THE KINGDOM OF GOD 101**

**October 19, 2008**

Today we are entering the Kingdom of God 101, a classroom where the teachers are children; toddlers and their older siblings and friends. Before we begin, we will take a quiz to determine our childmind; that is our ability to experience life as a child. The quiz is now appearing on the screens:

**YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN A CONSTRUCTION PAPER CORN COB, PASTE AND CHEERIOS. THE CHEERIOS ARE FOR:**

- 1. Pasting on your corncob**
- 2. Throwing and rolling on the floor**
- 3. Eating with your paste**

(2. or 3. is a good answer but 3 is best because then you get an extra snack)

**YOU ARE AT THE FINGERPAINTING TABLE. YOU FINGERPAINT ON:**

- 1. Paper**
- 2. The child next to you**
- 3. Your face**

(Your face is best because it will freak out your mom. If you fingerpaint on the child next to you, you will freak out their mom)

**WHILE YOU ARE PLAYING IN THE BLOCK CENTER, ANOTHER CHILD TAKES YOUR FAVORITE TRUCK. YOU:**

- 1. Say politely, "its my turn"**
- 2. Grab onto the truck and pull as hard as you can**
- 3. Bite the other child**

(Biting the other child works best, but if they scream, which they will, you will have to set in the quiet box and that's a bummer)

**DURING STORY CIRCLE, YOU:**

- 1. Listen to the teacher**
- 2. Sing "Itsy Bitsy Spider" while tickling the child sitting next to you**
- 3. Jump up and down**

(Either 2 or 3 is a good answer, but 3 is best because all the other children will jump up and down with you and maybe even the teacher)

During the week, as a preschool teacher, I have experienced this: A toddler washing his hands for ten minutes because he has discovered that when he squirts a cupful of soap into the sink, he can make enough bubbles to cover the bathroom floor. A little girl overjoyed to find out that the scissors that she used to cut construction paper can also be used to restyle her best friend's hair. And how about this story, one of my personal favorites; a little three year old, wearing his new batman underwear for the first time, greeting each parent as they drop off their child by racing to the door, pulling down his pants, doing a little dance and yelling, "I'm pooping in the potty so my batman's are clean." WOW! Reflecting again on our scripture lesson, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child, will never enter it." We may be asking ourselves: "What was Jesus thinking?" Believe it or not, these same children can teach us three Kingdom Principles.

Children possess the ability to live in the moment. Unfettered by calendars, planners and schedules, they experience life as it is in the here-and-now. We worry about the future and grieve about the past but Jesus asks us to live in the present: In the gospel of Luke, Jesus says:

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body what you will wear. Life is more than food and the body more than clothes...Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life. Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest...So do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the nations of the world run after such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his Kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."

Through endless rounds of ring-around-the-rosie, nose blowing, diaper changing, owie kissing and story reading, children have taught me the first Kingdom principle: Live today fully, give tomorrow to God.

The tragedy of our times is that for many children it is very difficult, if not impossible to "live today fully". Even in "normal day to day living" children worry. "What," you may ask,

“can a child find to worry about?” Is not childhood a time both protected and innocent? The answer is no. In our materialistic society, riddled with distorted values, x-rated T.V., crazy schedules and motives based upon self-gratification, there is plenty for children to worry about. Children sense the struggle of the adults around them: Upon arrival at preschool, a little boy informed me that “Mommy was crying on the bed because Daddy hit her”. Another child, with a broken arm first told me that he had “fallen”, but later confessed, in tears, that “Mommy had thrown him on the couch and he had fallen to the floor. I remember listening with horror as a child of nine in the eating disorder unit at Children’s Hospital shared how she and friends at school had entered into a starvation pact because, in her words, “no one loves you unless you are thin.” And I and co-workers wept at the psychiatric hospital when a five year old child was admitted to the children’s unit because she had tried to strangle herself using a scarf and the closet doorknob. Children worry about making friends, being alone, and feeling safe. They will share their worries when we are willing to listen, really listen, without talking on a cell phone or speaking with another adult at the same time. Children will share their concerns openly, their hurts honestly when we bend down, gather them on our lap and focus on their words, just as Jesus did.

In the letter to the Romans, Paul says this:

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”

When we enter into the world that our children see, we are faced with our brokenness and the reality of that brokenness can break our heart. But, here is the good news. Our wonderful loving God has been at work providing a way of healing for us and for our children.

Through Jesus, the King of the Kingdom we can find wholeness. This is the second Kingdom principle we learn from our children.

The third Kingdom principle taught by our children follows logically from the second. When we experience the sadness of our children we realize that we are called to work with God to create a world which is compassionate and just. Because children are willing to share their sadness and to face it with courage, they are also able to demonstrate compassion and a strong sense of justice. I was deeply comforted by the compassion and love that my preschoolers offered after my father died. When I walked into my classroom several days after the funeral, the children greeted me hugs and kisses. Apparently co-workers had told the children that my father was ill because a chorus of little voices began asking, “Daddy sick, Daddy o.k. now Miss Julie?” “My Daddy is ok now,” I said, but the children could see the tears in my eyes. One little girl ran to the Kleenex box and brought a tissue and tried to wipe my eyes. One child climbed on my lap and stroked my cheek. Several children gathered round and patted my shoulder or held my hand. It was a precious moment.

Such moments of spontaneous caring often occur in our classroom. Children help each other put their shoes on. (You will see such a sequence in our video clip in a few shortly.)

An arriving child in the morning is greeted with a chorus of welcoming voices and hugs. Two year olds help each other find jackets, share favorite toys, encourage each other when using the potty, even eat paste together.

If compassion is the act of one person caring for another, then justice is a whole community taking action to take care of one person. Luke is a little boy who seldom cries. One day, while he and Ciaran were playing with cars and trucks, Ciaran grabbed Luke’s truck, hit him in the head with it and then threw the truck into the playhouse. Luke not only began crying,

his cry became a scream. Other children joined me on the scene. One child ran to get Luke's truck. Another two year old began hugging Luke. While a chorus of little voices demanded ice for Luke's "owie", several children escorted Ciaran to the quiet box while saying firmly, "not okay, hurt Luke, what a bummer!" I was amazed to see Ciaran place himself in the quiet box without a word from me. Later, Ciaran went to Luke and hugged him. This ability of my small one's to understand fair play is impressive. I have often thought that world leaders would be better at negotiating peace agreements if they had to be preschool teachers for a year before assuming public office.

In short, children "get it". At some level, they are able to comprehend and accept, without question, the wonderful absurdity of a God who makes himself present in the life, death and resurrection of an impoverished Jewish carpenter in long ago Nazareth, and that carpenter, Jesus, realized that we could learn a great deal from these little children. One afternoon last year a terrible thunderstorm struck during naptime. As thunder and lightning seemed to shake our little preschool, my two year olds began waking up, crying, and jumping off their cots. They gathered around me, sitting on my lap and holding on, seeking reassurance. As I sought comforting words, one little voice began to sing "Jesus Loves Me" and other little voices joined in. At the end, one dear little girl looked up at me and said simply, "Jesus here, Miss. Julie, Jesus here"!

Jesus is here, my friends, and children are leading us into an understanding of the Kingdom Principles:

- Live today fully; give tomorrow to God
- We are broken, but through Jesus, the King of the Kingdom, we can find wholeness
- We are called to work with Jesus to create a world that is compassionate and just

Let us celebrate children together as we watch this short film clip:

Often, I pray this prayer:

*Jesus, friend of little children,  
Be a friend to me;  
Take my hand and ever keep me  
Close to thee.  
Never leave me, nor forsake me,  
Ever be my friend;  
For I need thee from life's dawning  
To its end.*

Our lives, from beginning to end, are held in the loving hands of our friend Jesus. And the ministry of Jesus, so vital to our family of faith, is taught to us by our children and is carried out through the loving hands of our church members. Today, it is such a privilege to recognize the members of our care committees who offer their time and talents in loving service to all of us.

Will you please stand if you are helping the church through:

- The phone calling ministry
- The card sending ministry
- The meal ministry
- The prayer quilt ministry
- The visitation ministry
- The Handy Helpers
- The Prayer Chain

Also, please stand if you have donated stamps; if you have donated cards or if you have delivered poinsettias, or Easter lilies. All of these ministries are vital to our caregiving efforts. God bless each and every one of you for your willingness to serve. Please join me in thanking these wonderful helpers. (CLAP)

Will you pray with me:

Thank you, God, for this family of faith. We seek to serve you through our willingness to learn the principles of your Kingdom and to apply those principles in our ministry to one another. In the name of Jesus, our King and example, we pray. Amen.