

The Gift of Children
August 11, 2024
Mark 10:13-16 (NIrV)

There are countless ways young children think the Lord's Prayer should be said after listening to adults recite it. Perhaps you have heard a child say something like:

- Our Father who does art in heaven Harold be thy name¹, or
- lead us not into temptation, but deliver us some e-mail.²

Whether about prayer or other matters of faith, we like to think that we teach children, but often they teach us far more than we teach them. Perhaps this is, in part, because they are curious and not shy about asking great theological questions – questions like

- Did God mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?³
- In Sunday school my teacher told us what God does, but who does all that stuff when God is on vacation?⁴

With questions such as these perhaps we should extend the time given to the children's message each week. Or, maybe we should consider adding something new to each worship service: a time for adults. Imagine a child or younger member of our youth group inviting all of the adults to come forward for a special lesson.

While that change isn't something planned, today is an important reminder that we are called to value children as precious.

According to *The Jesus Priorities* we live into this habit when we

- become like children,
- protect children, and
- welcome children.⁵

¹ "Prayers." <http://www.iusedtobelieve.com/religion/prayers/prayers_d10.php>

² "From the Mouths of Children."

<http://www.1stholistic.com/reading/liv_humor-from-the-mouths-of-children.htm>

³ "Letters to God." <http://lossofsoul.com/LIFE_IS/God/letters_1-en.htm>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Christopher Maricle. *The Jesus Priorities: 8 Essential Habits* (Nashville, Upper Room, 2007), p.108.

Become Like Children

For some of us the most difficult behavior on this short list is to become like children or to be childlike. We must, however, find our way to this way of being since Jesus in this morning's reading is quoted as saying, "Anyone who will not receive God's kingdom like a little child will never enter it."

Perhaps becoming like children involves reacquainting ourselves with child-like attributes. One article I read suggested that this means becoming trusting, natural, and spontaneous.⁶

Trusting. Accept the world around you. Enjoy new people.

Natural. Be happy being yourself. Don't worry about what others think.

Spontaneous. Be caught up in the moment. Do something that isn't on your calendar.

Imagine being more childlike in your life, but especially in your life of faith.

Protect Children

As you begin to reconnect with your childlike faith, your adult sensibilities will demand that you protect children. You want the actual children all around you to be safe.

Here at Advent this caring includes policies and procedures to create a safe and loving Christian environment for all young people. It requires us to do the hard work of thinking intentionally and proactively about our intergenerational offerings. And, it means that we commit the resources needed to have robust and safe ministries for children and youth.

Our commitment to protect children often leads us to actions beyond the walls of the church. It shapes the way we care for and about our own children and grandchildren, for children in our local community, and for all of God's children. It is what inspires many of us to volunteer for area non-profits or to work tirelessly to pass legislation.

⁶ Becoming Like Children. Available from <https://catholic-daily-reflections.com/2022/08/08/becoming-like-children-2/>

Welcome Children

As we reconnect with our own childlike faith and work to protect children, we will provide children with a wonderfully warm welcome. For Advent this is an important part of what it means to be a congregation known for its radical hospitality.

Think of all of the children we welcome each year through our children's focused outreach events like Sunday Funday activities, the Easter Egg Hunt, and Trunk or Treat. But think also of the many ways we invite children and youth to grow in their faith through our ongoing programming. And, importantly know that we encourage our children and youth to lead and inspire us.

This morning Advent Lutheran Church has welcomed children in beautiful ways with the Blessing of the Backpacks and the Sharing of Stories from the Gathering. My hope is that this does more than simply begin a new year; it inspires us all to truly welcome children into every aspect of congregational life.

I trust that you'll go out of your way today and in the future to make sure that children are welcome here.

Conclusion

It is often said that children and youth are the future of the church. That statement is partially correct. It simply neglects to name the important truth that children and youth also have big roles to play in the church today.

Jesus valued children and named them as precious. It is my hope and prayer that you will do the same.

Amen.