



Wednesday Prayer

19th Sunday after Pentecost – The priceless gifts of children

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. Mark 10:13-16

In August, my congregation held three outdoor evening services called “Worship: The Practice.” We decided that we had been away from worship for so long that we needed to “practice” how to do it! We agreed these nights would be meaningful & messy, quick & unfussy, a worship practice for all. For three weeks, 3-year-old to 80-something worshippers gathered in lawn chairs in front of our church to practice worship together. Our children helped lead songs and read Bible stories, the storyteller asked us questions and let us speak and share, we learned and sang new songs, we made mistakes, and we laughed. We also painted a giant mural together, we placed encouraging stickers on our friends as a blessing, we put together dental hygiene kits, and we used post-it notes to write prayers of help, thanks, and wow. These nights were filled with joy and wonder, and the pride on one little girl’s face as she read a prayer we couldn’t hear, was a priceless gift.

So often in our churches and in our worship, we expect our children to be silent and still, as if they were tiny adults. In the year 2021, it is an IMPOSSIBLE request! The world has changed. Children are kinetic and verbal, they have questions and they are in motion, they are curious and they WANT to be a part of this mystery of the Trinity and messiness of human community. And we need to invite them to be a part of it.

When we do that – when we create a safe and inviting space where children can contribute without the expectation of perfection – we promote healthy and safe relationships and we empower children to live into their identity as beloved children of God. Children who have meaningful relationships with adults, who contribute and lead, who feel valued and important, are children who are surrounded by a safety net that will provide a layer of protection against those who would exploit them. Moving forward, my hope is that faith communities will invite some messiness and chaos into their midst, just as Jesus invited the children to come.

Creator God, who made the earth in all its beauty and chaos, be with us as we extend a hand of welcome to all children. Give us the patience and courage to allow for some noise and a little bit of messiness, so that every generation can work together to create safe communities for our children. Amen.

Written by Deacon Erica Larson, Director of Faith Formation at Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church, and co-writer of Cherish All Children’s *Safe and Healthy Relationships Youth Guide* – to be posted to our website soon!