

**August 4, 2024      Sacred Synergy: The Playground of God**

**Ecclesiastes 8:15 CEB-*Common English Bible***

So I commend enjoyment because there's nothing better  
for people to do under the sun but to eat, drink, and be glad.  
This is what will accompany them in their hard work,  
during the lifetime that God gives under the sun.

**Mark 10:13-16 CEB**

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing children to Jesus so that he would bless them.  
But the disciples scolded them.  
<sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said to them,  
“Allow the children to come to me. Don't forbid them,  
because God's kingdom belongs to people like these children.  
<sup>15</sup> I assure you that whoever doesn't welcome God's kingdom like a child  
will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup> Then he hugged the children and blessed them.

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Sacred Synergy occurs in so many ways—through song and music,  
through books and movies, through scripture and prayer,  
through laughter and tears, through quiet stillness and robust play!

God is at work, alive, moving and grooving in the power of the Holy Spirit  
in and through everything!

Christ embodied this sacred synergy as both fully human and fully God.  
Our trinitarian theology... our understanding of God in three persons  
is sacred synergy as revealed throughout scripture.

That holy synergy was invoked today as I laid hands upon little Amalia  
& blessed her in the name & power & strength of the father, son, & HS.

Baptism is all about sacred synergy! “Oh let the little children come to me,  
Christ said to his grumpy disciples in today's reading.

Having Amalia here today... having kids time each week in the summer,  
kids church, young followers, & youth group in the fall...  
having 1<sup>st</sup> Light Preschool are all blessings of joy, fun, & playfulness  
in our worship experience, church and faith journey.

It's why I just concluded a four week podcast series on PLAY,  
Sharing about how it shapes the brain, opens the imagination,  
and invigorates the soul!

Just look at what a few little red, green, yellow and blue rubber balls  
accomplished this morning!

The Playground of God is all around us, if we but look and see,  
~If we let the little children come to Christ in new & exciting ways,  
~If we but remember our own childhoods  
& release the inner child wanting to come out and play,  
~If we but see the God who loves to reveal the gift & power of play.

Friends, can we imagine a God who sings a happy song over us,  
a God who dances with shouts of joy?  
Could our God be the one who laughs and enjoys life?

Scripture tells us that God's playground is all of creation and the people  
who dwell in it.

God enjoys this beauty in all its diversity and opportunities,  
sees that it is good and takes great delight in all that is.

In today's 1<sup>st</sup> reading from Ecclesiastes we are commended to enjoy life...  
other translations say: have fun, mirth, joy, pleasure... WHY?  
Because this playful fun side of life...  
should also accompany us in our hard work throughout our lifetime.  
It's BOTH/AND, Work and play!

The Gospel message to “become like little children”  
in order to enter into the Kingdom of heaven...I believe...  
is a huge stamp of approval for the importance of play in our lives.

There is gusto, passion, and enthusiasm in this sacred synergy  
of connection with God; a sense of awe, wonder, and delight.

Friends, as children we are born to play, it is in our DNA!  
Children at the earliest of ages respond to life as a full on,  
multi-sensory experience.

A baby inside the womb starts movin' & groovin'...  
letting its existence be known.

Each of us is born—curious, trusting, exploring, creative individuals.  
Kids take great delight in life, discovering everything for the first time,  
being full of awe at the most ordinary things of life...  
Accepting mystery as a gift waiting to be unwrapped.

Trusting, enthusiastic children are amazed at life and greet the world  
with such eager enthusiasm and unfiltered joy.

As we grow older, somehow this part of ourselves seems to get lost.  
Adults begin to tell us how we ought to think and act.

Now, while children need to learn appropriate boundaries  
for their behavior and to develop social skills,  
far too often the wonder and joy of life is lost in the process of learning  
how to grow up and adapt to the world.

Many times, a child's words and behavior are judged  
according to the way they fit into an adult's agenda.  
So, kids learn to adapt to situations by keeping their mouths shut,  
by not talking, or laughing, or asking questions  
when it would be natural to do so.

This is why I love having the kids come up front and sit in the altar area.  
I love the way they ask questions, the answers they share,  
their giggles and squirming, their desire to learn,  
to splash in the baptismal waters like Amalia did this morning...  
to play joyfully in God's house!

Our kids learn far too quickly to worry about what others will think  
and to fear the inevitable failures that will come in life.

This eventually squashes the inner child  
that is within each and every one of us!

The disciples from today's Gospel reading reflect this adult  
response to the inner child when they tried to chase away children  
being brought to Jesus for a blessing.

The disciples couldn't be bothered with the kids.

They interrupted the day's schedule.

They were asking too many questions.

They running around, not maintaining an orderly line.

~So the disciples scolded those who were bringing little children to Jesus.

And when Jesus saw this he was indignant, some translations say  
angry, or upset...and said to them, "Let the little children come to me;  
Do not stop them; For it is to such as these  
that the Kingdom of God belongs."

Jesus lovingly accepts the young children with their eyes of wonder,  
giggles of shyness, squirming energy, and unabashed playful openness.  
He welcomed them into his life, altered his schedule for them,  
and told the disciples that their **own spirits** needed to be  
like children's in order to enter the Kingdom of God.

This is a powerful reminder of the sacred synergy of play!

When we lose sight of our inner child,  
the playfulness that is part of our DNA,  
we lose a beautiful and essential part of ourself.

We become serious and competitive.

We focus on obeying and agreeing and being accepted.

We get our applause by working hard and then working even harder,  
or by living up to others often unrealistic expectations.

When we do this, much of the joy of life is missed.

The more busy you are, the more important you are.

Work gives your life meaning and value.

Doing is much more important than being...let alone PLAYING!

Friends our work ethic does not promote a genuine sense of play,  
let alone honor the playfulness of life that is all around us,  
and deeply within us.

Instead we are praised for how hard we work, how much money we make,  
how busy we are, and how much we can produce.

My friends, when was the last time you were praised for playing?

In fact, we tend to think of play as only some kind of guilty pleasure,  
a distraction from “real” work & important responsibilities.

I believe that far too many of us are living with a play deficit,  
& it's costing us more than we think in our lives, family, church  
& communities.

Some researchers indicate that PLAY is the single most significant factor  
in determining success and happiness.

Play is a catalyst—it is a transformative possibility of sacred synergy  
that we far too often ignore.

The beneficial effects of getting just a little play can spread thru our lives,  
actually making us more productive and happier in everything we do.

The power of play is palpable! Play impacts us physically.

Play opens the imagination. Play invigorates the soul.

Whenever we unleash the power of play in our lives,  
we can learn how to bring a sense of excitement and adventure  
into everything that we do.

Work can become an extension of our play lives and we can fully engage with the world around us with multi-sensory joy and wonder.

Friends play is all about intentionally enjoying life...  
without having to be functional or productive all the time.

When we are experiencing the joyfulness of play  
we often do not have anything to show for it, except a happy heart,  
or a spirit that relishes the now, be it time spent alone or with others.

We can go fishing or dance or plant tomatoes or play pickleball  
or watch a sunset without worrying about how much fish we catch,  
or whether the tomatoes will ripen in time or if we win the match.

We simply enjoy the creative, restorative process of play itself  
and whatever form or activity we engage in...  
we simply enjoy being in God's amazing playground.

~Play helps us to wake up each day feeling deeply grateful  
for the gift of life.

~Players are less frantic and fretful because our hearts can trust and hope.

~Playfulness creates a deeper harmony of mind, body and spirit.

And Jesus said let the little children come to me... let them play,  
and have fun & joy each and every day,  
along with all their work and their service in my name.

Because God's Kingdom—God's playground belongs to people  
like these amazing, curious, giggling, rambunctious children!

So what would it look like for you & for me—to try & be less productive,  
and to be more playful this week? It's hard!

Let's let ourselves be a bit freer, and not afraid to try something new.  
Focus on wonder. Try to see the world thru the eyes of a child—  
actually, through our own inner child of so long ago—  
& discover what joy & happiness can be in this crazy world  
that just keeps coming at us!

Life is a playground waiting to be explored...  
God's playground that can help us find renewal, joy, and delight  
So let's just get out there and have some fun  
Playing in God's Sacred Synergy!  
May it be so! Amen and Amen!