

Matthew 18:1-6 ‘What We Learn from Children’

When I was about three years old I played with my father in the back yard. Dad taught me to run off of the end of the porch and jump into his arms. I remember running as fast as I could right off the end of the porch into my father’s arms. We played this game often and he caught me every time. One day I was playing on the back porch while dad was fixing the lawnmower on the sidewalk below. Without warning him I decided to run right off the end of the porch, absolutely certain that he would catch me. He turned from the lawnmower just in time to see me flying through the air. As wrenches flew into the air he caught me with greasy hands and we both tumbled into the grass. I trusted in my father’s ability to catch me even when he wasn’t ready to do so. That is the faith of a child.

One day the disciples asked Jesus, “*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*” Jesus called a small child to stand before them. He said, “*I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of God.*” The disciples misunderstood the Kingdom of God to be a place for them to show off their own personal skills and abilities. Jesus told them that unless they became like children they would never set foot in the kingdom of God. Unless we learn what it means to run and jump into our heavenly Father’s arms with faith in His plan, his will and his purpose, we will never enter the Kingdom of God.

Now sometimes we read in the bible that we are to be more like

children and in other places we read we are to no longer be like children. In 1 Corinthians 14:20 God tells us, “***Do not be like children in your thinking...***” When Jesus tells us to ‘be like children’ he is in no way telling us to remain in ignorance about God’s Word; to avoid personal responsibility; or blame others for decisions we ourselves have made. God expects us to grow up and be mature, responsible, hard-working people who take responsibility for living our life. When Jesus tells us that we must turn and become like children He is talking about imitating the faith of the child that is so pure and trusting that he can run and jump into his father’s arms without hesitation. Indeed it is one of those ironies of the Christian faith that the more we mature in our faith the more childlike is our trust in God. With childlike faith we trust that Jesus did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. By childlike faith we trust our Savior’s promise to forgive our sin and save us through His cross. A mature faith is a childlike faith, trusting in Jesus and His Word above all things.

Jesus proclaimed that we enter the kingdom of heaven with the faith of a child. So adamant was Jesus to honor the simple faith of a child that He declared that anyone who dares to harm the faith of one of these little ones it would be better if that person would have a large millstone tied around his neck and he be thrown into the depth of the sea! With this rather harsh image Jesus charges every adult with the responsibility to nurture and protect the little children in our midst. Children stand before us as an example of saving faith. We adults are also charged with the responsibility to protect and nurture that simple faith. Jesus clearly placed this responsibility upon us. Any adult who harms a child’s faith will be held accountable for their irresponsibility. Jesus gives us the image of a heavy millstone tied

around one's neck and being thrown into the sea so that we might recognize the high responsibility that God gives us to nurture the faith of the children. And that leads us to think about this Rally Day and the responsibility God gives to Christian parents and to the congregation to provide Christian education for the children in our care.

One of the important tasks God gives His holy Church is that we teach God's Word to the children in our midst. It is the responsibility of Christian parents to bring their children to be baptized as soon as possible after they are born that they might receive God's precious gift of salvation. Following baptism every parent will begin to nurture their children's faith by praying for them, reading bible stories to them, taking them to Sunday School and Worship. It is the responsibility of every congregation to provide opportunities to teach children the Word of God through Sunday School and weekday school program. This morning we will recognize and commission all those who serve as Sunday School and weekday school teachers in our midst. I encourage you to thank these teachers and encourage and support them for they are doing the work of God's kingdom. My grandmother and my mother taught Sunday school. I remember one Saturday night while visiting my grandparents that after my grandmother cooked supper, washed the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen, she gathered all her Sunday School teaching materials to the dining room table to prepare to teach the Sunday school lesson the next morning. I saw the love she poured into her lessons. She spoke of her children with love in her heart. She called them her 'kiddos'. She loved them as Jesus' little lambs. I watched her prepare the hand-out pages and cut-out projects she would give as object lessons. I watched my mother put

this same love and attention into teaching God's Word to the children and I see it in heart of every Sunday School teacher. The best way you can support Sunday School and our teachers is to take the effort to bring your children to Sunday School every Sunday. There is nothing more encouraging than a class filled with students ready to learn the Word of God. God has placed children in our midst so that we may never forget to see the joy of the Christian faith through their eyes. As Jesus lifted up a child before the disciples as an example of what saving faith is all about and then warned them never to harm their faith so we also learn the joy of childlike trust in God from the children and make the intentional decision to nurture their faith with our example in worship, bible study, devotions and prayers. Your children are watching you closely to learn what Christian faith is all about. You nurture their faith by your example. We are all children of the heavenly Father. Jesus went to the cross for us that we might be saved from sin and death and receive His free gift of salvation and eternal life. We receive this gift by faith. It is that faith that we are called to nurture and defend.

As a little child I did not hesitate to run off the porch trusting my father would catch me. He did. I had no doubt that he would. The little children in our midst are running and jumping, trusting you to show them the love of Jesus. The children rely on us to share Jesus with them. Jesus uses them to show us the simple joy of running and jumping into Jesus' arms. Jesus will catch us. Jesus will save us. That is our faith. Ame n