

Calvary United Methodist Church
September 29, 2019

“CHILDREN HERE, THERE, & EVERYWHERE”
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children’s Message:

Luke 8:22-25

I invite our children to come forth at this time. Good morning! Welcome! Good to have everyone with us today.

How many of you have been taught a few rules about life? Have you been taught some things like do you play ball out in the street? No. Why don’t you do that? It’s not safe to play ball out in the street. How about if you see something walking a dog you’ve never met before or playing with a cat. Do you run right up and play with it? (No!) Why? (Child speaks.) It might run away or it might bite. We should always ask, “May I come pet your dog or cat or whatever.” Why do you think we have rules like that? To keep you safe.

The Bible tells a story about learning lessons to keep us safe as well, for all of us, not just for children like you, but in God’s eyes we are all children, even though some of us are quite a bit older. So I want to share these words:

My child, listen and accept what I say. Then you will have a long life. I am guiding you in wisdom and I am leading you to do what is right. Nothing will hold you back. You will not be overwhelmed. Always remember what you have been taught. Don’t let go of it. Keep safe all that you have learned. It is the most important thing in your life.

Well, there is a real good reason for that, because the things you have learned here today that you’ve known about dogs and playing in the street and where you ride your bike, they keep you safe. But there are a lot of things that we learn all the days of our life about safety and being secure.

Do any of you know what that is? (A picture.) Well, it’s a picture. You are exactly right. Anyone else know what in more detail that might be? There is an old banker back there, just the banker, not an old bank. Someone that used to work in a bank. These are safe deposit boxes in a vault, something like this here. It’s a great big thick in a steel locker and it keeps you safe from fire and theft and earthquakes and tornadoes and many of you probably even...these are often found in banks, but sometimes we have small ones in our home and they keep very important papers and very valuable things that we want to keep. (Child speaks.) A lot of churches have them and a lot of offices have them. And sometimes we have small ones even in our homes. (Child speaks.) I’m sure a lot of people love the flowers. They make them very happy.

When we have safes, they are sometimes combinations, but do you know what that is? It’s a

key and keys open things like a door, people keep little boxes we have and God's Word is like a key for our life that we can find out what is the truth. Keys unlock locks. These sometimes come with combinations instead of keys. We lock our bikes. But part of it is all these things are about keeping things safe. And God says of His Word, the Bible: I'm teaching you things. Just like your parents taught you to be safe from other things, God says: My Word is here to keep you safe all the days of your life.

Hear this again in Deuteronomy: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. These are commandments I give you today, put them upon your hearts. Impress them on our children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

God is basically saying in these things: I want you to know all these things about God, that I love you and you need to love one another and love our neighbor and love ourselves and love God.

See, one thing is thinking about God with our heart, but he says put them also in your minds. That way when I asked you this morning about the dogs and playing in the street, it's in your mind. You don't forget because you want to be safe.

There is a difference between what we feel in our heart and what we think in our minds sometimes. Have you ever seen a big pile of change just laying around the house? (I did!) You did? Most of us, my dad and mom cleaned out their pockets and purses sometimes and lay them and if I would go up, do you think that's right to just go up and take all that money? (No!) No! See, in my mind I'm thinking: they won't mind if I take some money to buy some junk food or something, right? But in my heart I'm thinking: that's not mine. I don't have a right to take that. And so you think about that.

Do you know what these things are? They are a very favorite bill that a lot of us have. These are the biggest bill that we have and so if I saw a pile of them, I would say the same thing. Well, it's not mine, I really can't take that. I might want it but I really know in my heart I shouldn't do it.

What if you see, because this has happened to me and it's happened probably to your folks if you live long enough. Were you ever walking through a parking lot and you find some money on the ground? Or you saw someone drop it. You've done that. Would you just keep it? (No!) Not if you can find out who it belongs to. You've been taught well. That's really good because the right thing...in our mind we might think, well, I now have money, but in our heart, God says: No, that's not mine. I have to do the right thing because someone that lost it will miss it.

So, our mind tells us one thing, but we need to learn those rules. Our heart makes us loving. For instance if I saw someone who was sad, maybe broken, in my mind I might think I'm busy and I keep going, but in my heart it says: ah, they are sad. If I was sad I wish someone would stop and talk to me. So I might go up and say: Are you okay? Just because I want to find out that they are okay, because in my mind I'm thinking no matter how busy I am, in my heart if I was sad I would hope someone would care for me.

If I saw someone running and sometimes along the highway I see people and I think: well, if they are not exercising maybe they are late like for school. Have you ever been late for class and have to run for a class? Or if you have to run for something. We get into those positions and so we think: Well, I'm in a hurry too. But the loving thing is: Can I help you with something?

Now, this picture is going to seem way unrelated. Do you know what they are? (Pickles.) They are pickles. Now, all pickles pretty much look like pickles, but there are certain kinds of pickles that are called "Kosher" pickles. Kosher pickles are blessed by a Rabbi. We are Christians and there are other religious groups and one of them is Judaism and they have Rabbis and they have laws about what they are allowed to eat. And they are supposed to eat certain foods and it reminds them that they are Jewish, that they belong to God.

In the Christian faith, we have this symbol that reminds us that God loves us and that we belong to God. You might see that in your home, you see it here in the church. You might see it on a piece of jewelry. You might see it in a variety of places, so when I think of that, I am reminded that God loves me. So I hope anytime you see it you are reminded that God loves you.

And these words that I shared with you a few moments ago are very important words and they are words that God says: I want you to write them in your minds. I want you to write them at night and put them on your doorposts. He says wherever you are I want you to always remember: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

If you learn these lessons as much as whether or not you can pet somebody's stray dog or whether you can ride your bike out in the street or play in the street, these are the things that God wants us to learn so that we might know we are always loved.

So, I thank you for coming up today. There are some fruit snacks there on your way out. Thank you so much for coming.

Old Testament Lesson

I would share with you the lessons today talking about children, and I believe in God's eyes we are all children. There is a purity about children. They are like fresh clay to be molded

and shaped and no matter what period of our life we find us, that old thing is that I'm an old dog and I can't learn new tricks. Well, these aren't tricks and we are not really old dogs. God's Word is fresh every day. It is life changing every day. It is our anchor. And I invite you to hear this Word from Deuteronomy. (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

Message:

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

We have children of our own and there are children all around us and we are children of the world. And one of the reasons there is chaos, one of the reasons there is brokenness, not only among individual lives, but in familial lives and in our communities and in our nations of this world, we have forgotten the commands of God. Simple as that. We have not loved ourselves as God wants us to. God thinks you are really wonderful. Hope you know that. You are a gift, remember that? And we have not loved others the way we want to be loved and we certainly haven't loved God first. And so, God is calling us home through these words.

When I think of the children, I think not only do I see innocence there, I see potential, live changers, the cure for some radical disease, the invention that will save the environments or whatever. Children as God's gifts like we still are as children of God to be creative. We can be molded, we can be shaped by Almighty God and those around us if we allow ourselves to be malleable enough to make a difference in the Kingdom and we choose, not just what I want out of life, to simply say every day of our life: God, I'm yours today. What is it you will have from me on this very day? When he lays before us these decrees, we could stand here all day if we wanted to and go through the Old Testament. These are rules, rules for living and if you follow all these rules, life will be good. Just like the protection of the children, whether we are approaching a strange animal or whether playing on the street, God says: if you follow my rules for life, it will go well and you will prosper, but you need to desire to love God and love your neighbor. That's pretty much combined if you put all those rules together. It says: Your decrees are very trustworthy; holiness befits your house, O Lord, forever, in Psalms.

God just doesn't throw out rules. You remember at home when your mother and father or someone in your household said to you: Go do this. And what's the word? Why? God said clearly: Because it will go with you and your life will prosper. He didn't just throw out rules for no reason. And we know the ending of this Kingdom. It is a victory for all who have followed Jesus Christ. It's the promise of new life, but until then we live in oftentimes brokenness.

When I hear the stories throughout my life and you see them in the news daily of the brokenness and the despair and the children who have lost their dreams and their hopes because of what they have experienced. And children aren't the only ones. Remember I said children of all ages? When you find someone that is growing in their years and their family is gone from them. I've done a funeral recently where five children didn't come to their father's funeral. Five. Immediately we think: boy, he must have been a miserable man. Immediately my

mind is back to thinking: what shaped him into the person he was? Was he a vet that saw too much life and death? Was he beaten and abused by someone else who was beaten and abused as a child and passed that on to generations. Because what would allow a child of God to get to a point in life where no one was present with them? You see, we have lost the decrees of Almighty God. We have lost it.

In a few weeks we will be doing the sacrament of Holy Baptism here. We only have two sacraments: communion and baptism in our denomination. It's a gift. It's a remark to all those around that as parents we choose this day for this child that is a gift of ours, we will be obedient to God, we will teach them God's Word, we will teach them how to live, we will set an example before them. But if the parents of these children do not come and if we make promises that we will teach them in our Sunday school, we will teach them to pray and teach them public worship, if we don't do it, how in the world will these children ever become the child of God they need to be? If we don't do our part and the family does not do their part, one of the scriptures I share with couple is: It is better, do you know what God thinks of children? It would be better if a millstone were around your neck and you were drowned in the ocean. They aren't my words. They are God's.

This is what God thinks so much about the importance of His Word: Train your children well that they might well go well with them. It's a reminder as they become a youth it is all on their shoulders. Do you now want to become a part of this group called Christianity? Do you want to confess that you are a sinner and that you need God and that you have new life?

Proverb 22:6: Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it. Some of you who have been parents are saying: When am I going to see the fruit of that labor, right? We see our children drift in and out. And as a pastor I've seen this. Young families decide to have children, they go to a nursery and they look and they call the church saying: you know what? I haven't been obedient, I haven't been there. I've been drifting away. I want my child, the longer I think about it, I want my child to have faith. It's not up to us at that point. We can only plant the seeds. We can only pray. We can only teach while we have them in our homes. And God will bring them home, that they might indeed find the family that they need to be.

These words: I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. What does that mean? It means that we are seekers. Children seek all the time. My sisters used to babysit and when they would get those 2s and 3s: What's this? What's that? Why do we do this? Why do we do that? They are seeking to learn. Are you still seeking? Are you seeking God with your heart and your soul? Are you reading scriptures? Are you praying? Are you seeking fellowship? Are you seeking greater knowledge, not of this world, which will come to an end one day, but are you seeking to know more about God?

We are so much tied into this world. Our congregation here does a lot of great things. We

have all kinds of book and pencil collections for school. We do all kinds of wonderful things providing food for folks. In the winter sometimes we have coat and boot drives. All of those are wonderful and we ought to do them. Praise God for all of you who are a part of that. But if we miss this, we've missed it all. Our children, if they only have a place to sleep and food to eat and things to cover are no different than a dog or a cat or any other animal out in the woods. They are just surviving. What we do here is fill people with the Spirit of Almighty God. If we don't provide a basis for our children to grow up, I'm talking if you are 80, we are children. But if we are not nurturing ourselves, if we are not being fed the Word of God, if we are not praying, if we are not seeking, we are dying. For God's Word is life. And the brokenness that we complain about: someone share with me this morning...he comes home for work now and says: So, who was shot today? Have you listened to the news lately? This isn't Chicago or LA, this is Harrisburg and York and Lancaster. Every day.

The brokenness and the brokenness in the world apart is because of the lack of Jesus. And scripture says: If, if we put on these rules for life, if we take on Christ as our own, we will live and people will say: I like these people. I see the light of Christ. I can see the hope, I can see the promise, I want to be like that, in the depths of my heart I want to live for Christ. And God will see the difference and they will see it.

You've heard this twice already today, but it is important: Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands, bind them on your foreheads, write them on the doorframes of your houses and gates.

You know what I hear about when I go on groups anymore? Have you been to Troegs lately? Have you been to the winery? We talk so much about the things of the world, I rarely get with groups of people that talk about things about God. It's all about where you are going shopping or what you are doing this weekend or where are you going for your entertainment. It is about this short lived world and we are not talking about the Word which is eternal. We can have fun here, but if we are missing God, we are missing it all.

Where we walk is a very important thing. And where we learn to take our lives. We can walk in good places or we can walk in bad places. A teacher of our congregation was sharing yesterday that she teaches first grade in the city, in the projects. A first grader that every day cusses her out, multiple, using words that sailors would be embarrassed to use. You see, when we don't have God, we don't know what's right or wrong.

We in the church, I used to love this song: Wonderful Words of Life. What are you teaching your children? As much as I like Facebook, sometimes I see comical things of children doing really really bad things and people laughing and playing. That's never a good parental thing. Approving bad behavior when children are real little, but we have to teach. If you have children and you are not teaching them God's expectations, we've got problems.

I'm from up in Mifflin County and there are a lot of Amish up in our area and I went home the other week and I saw these kids and I know the family quite well. They are neighbors. The daughter is now about 3 and the one son, they have a lot of them, but the one is about 5 and the kids had a wheelbarrow. The little one the arms are up here and the little girl had a rake and they were raking the yard and getting ready for a family picnic. I wonder how many times we teach our children to work anymore. I've worked at the Neighborhood Center in the past and I remember these days with my own father when he would get frustrated and give me a rake or a shovel and I didn't know what to do and I said: Dad, you've got to teach me. Right? You've got to teach me.

You don't know how to do cooking if your mother or father do not teach you or a friend. You don't know how to bake if someone didn't teach you. You don't know how to shovel snow... You think as an adult it's just natural. No, it's not. The Word of God isn't natural if someone doesn't teach you.

I travel in the world and these are photos that I see all the time. Children that don't go to school, they work. I mean work. Ten, twelve hours picking stones and hauling them to trucks or sand or cement or something because their job...they are little adults at four and five years old. Someone has taught them to help their family.

Imagine all of us as an adult and someone shouting at you because you don't know how to do something. Imagine that. I can't believe you don't know what you are doing! And God would say: How would they know? And I say: How do I know if someone doesn't teach me? The Prophet Isaiah says that: How will our children of all ages, how will the lost in the streets of Harrisburg and Lancaster and York, how will your neighbors, how will your children, how will people around us know what God wants if we don't teach God? It doesn't fall out of the sky. It takes a lesson.

And when we hear that scripture: Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? He said, I tell you, unless you change, become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Children. To be like children we need to listen, we need to grow, we need to absorb, we need to question, we need to grow in our knowledge and our love and the wisdom of Almighty God.

Sometimes as children ask questions, I ask myself: Why did Jesus have such a love of children? I think children can be a lot of fun. I know they can be a lot of work. They can be so joyful, so playful, so innocent, so loving. Isn't it wonderful for those who are grandparents when a child comes over and hops in your lap and says: I love you? Right? Certainly there are not all high moments, but Jesus loved children because I believe he saw they are the future of the kingdom, all of us as children of God.

Why, we say, impress them? God knows that if we don't impress it, all you need is two or three generations without God and you have what we have now. What we have now, since the 50s and 60s, when people went away and drifted away from hearing the Word and you and I have the Word and yet we are conflicted because we are so much in the world. We talk to our children from the time they are entering first or second grade we already begin to ask what do you want to be when you grow up. We want them to be successful and we dream of houses and bank accounts and retirements and comfortable living, and God would say: That is not what this life is about. We all want it, but truly if that is all we are teaching we are failing our children. Children today have such stress because of these things. I saw this idea of their minds going crazy...that's a lot of us as adults. We have so much on our platters we very seldom slow down, breath deep and think about Almighty God.

When I used to sing in Gospel groups we sang this song: Have a little talk with Jesus. When have you had yours lately? Do you wake up in the morning and say: God, thank you for the night's rest? Thank you for another day to live. I do it almost every morning: God, what is it that you would have of me today? And when I don't do it, it's because I forgot and I feel bad. What is it that you will have of me today? Let me be your light to somebody. Use me in some ways. You see, we live lives in a world of chaos and it is because we don't ask God what he wants of us.

God says: You are mine. I delight, I delight in you. You are a gift of God and God wants to bless you in so many ways, but when we lose our connection to God, life's drudgery. We need to get reconnected to God and it's never too late.

Remember the songs about standing on solid ground? I used to watch those people who do the beam in gymnastics. I'm think how do they walk on a four inch beam? I can't walk with two feet without falling. But when I am in Jesus Christ, all other ground is sinking sand. Right? All other ground.

You see, teaching makes a difference. I remember a little song, talk about impressing on children. Some of you who have been teaching children in these churches forever: Oh, be careful little eyes what you see. I remember a woman in one of my churches telling me that her father had passed and her mother had to do what she had to do and she worked as a barmaid and this little girl when she was three or four lived every night at the bar. Doesn't have to be the worst thing in the world. Her mother was doing what she had to do to provide for her family. But it was probably also not the very best thing when you see things you shouldn't see at a young age.

Oh, be careful little ears what you hear. I remember years ago upsetting some of my youth when I took their tapes on a youth mission and destroyed them without their permission. Cussing and foul language and filth and degradation of women and police. You know when we laugh and allow things that are cruel and unacceptable to become acceptable, we've got a problem.

Oh, be careful little feet where you go. Where is it that we are taking folks, young and old? I'm not talking just our children. Remember I said we are all children. What are you listening to? What are you watching? Reading? Where are your feet talking you? Reminding you that you are a gift from God, what a pleasure it is to be a gift. What a pleasure it is when we hear that parable of Jesus that you are a light, not be held under a bushel but to be put on a stand on a hill where others can look. Folks are looking for you to be light and I'm praying today that God's light will always shine through you and shine in you, to fill you up that when you have those bad days you will overcome.

And the scripture says: Why? For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord. These are the plans. God wants you to have wonderful life right now and everlasting life. And he wants it to be a blessing every day. He gives us the gift of life and I pray you will receive it with a thankful heart and decide daily: Lord, what is it you will have of me today?

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have claimed us as your own, as heirs, your children of all ages. Use us, mold us, shape us into the vessels you would have us be. In Jesus' name. Amen.