

Children's Sabbath

The Sea is So Wide---My Boat is So Small

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* I have a book at home, given to me a long time ago, when my kids were little and I barely had time to read the newspaper, let alone an entire book. I think that's why my friend gave me this particular book, *Life's Little Instruction Book*, by H. Jackson Browne, Jr. In the book are little bits of wisdom, which to a busy, overwhelmed mom, seemed perfect. One of those little bits of wisdom came back to me this week as I considered our celebration of children. "Remember that children, marriages and flower gardens reflect the kind of care they get."

I have found this to be true in my own life. Exhibit A are the flower pots on my patio this morning. Had I paid attention to them last night and covered them or brought them inside, they would look different today. What and who we pay attention to will thrive. We must pay attention, especially to the children in our lives. We have tried highlight that today in worship. This morning, some of our children sang with the choir, the moment for children was more than a moment, we celebrated the volunteers who spend time teaching and loving our children, this morning's liturgy and music have highlighted the importance we place on children.

Today, we observe the Children's Sabbath. The Children's Sabbath, created and sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, is a way for faith communities to celebrate children as sacred gifts of the Divine, and it provides the opportunity for houses of worship to renew and live out their moral responsibility to care, protect and advocate for all children. This celebration is a part of a broader children's movement that aims to unite communities and religious congregations of all faiths across the nation in shared concern for children and a common

commitment to improving their lives and working for justice on their behalf.

As I talked with the children in our congregation this morning, I was reminded of a conversation I had with one of you this week. We were talking about, ideally, what we want the community of Bartlesville to know about our church. One thing we both felt strongly about was that we want people to know that here, at this church, there is support for parents and grandparents who are raising children. And as I look back on the frazzled mom of more than 20 years ago, I remember that very thing was the reason I got involved in the church down the block from my house. I wanted a place for me and my children to belong and I found it in Centennial Christian Church.

Disciples Christian Church is the same sort of welcoming, nurturing community. Our children's ministry programs are different than children's ministry programs in many other churches. We have one goal for our children's ministry programs and it is not that all of our children be able to quote many scripture verses or win a Bible quiz game, or even that they believe the "right" things. Our goal is to love them, showing them in as many ways as we can, that God loves them. Some of the ways we love them are: encouraging their questions, wondering about the stories in the Bible with them, thinking, with them, about why what's in the Bible matters to us today, and showing them over and over that there are many ways to connect with God and none of them are wrong. I think we are getting it right.

Jamie Bennett told me earlier week about how she and Bon came to this church. And she shared that one of the reasons they love this church is that, when their kids were growing up, members of the church stood in for grandparents unable to be here. They went to swim meets and school activities to support their children. Coincidentally, the first time I met Avery face to face, she shared the same sentiment with

me. That, friends, is children's ministry. It's relationships and showing up.

I'm grateful to Dee and Marit, and all who love our children well. Next Sunday, children's Sunday School will start up and, like Worship and Wonder, it will be perfect for our children. We are using curriculum from Progressive Christianity and it looks great! If you would like to spend some time with our cool kids, learning along with them, please consider volunteering in Worship and Wonder or Sunday School. I promise you will be trained and supported and well-loved by some amazing young people. Our concern for the well-being of children cannot end with the children in our congregation though. The Children's Sabbath reminds us that there are children all over our nation and the world who are important to God and therefore, must be important to us.

*On the framed tiles presented to Marit and Dee is the fisherman's prayer that is also part of the logo for the Children's Defense Fund. This prayer highlights the vulnerability of children and reminds us that we have a responsibility to protect them and to do what we need to do to bring about a just, peaceful world, not just for the children in our congregation, and in our homes, but for our nation's children and the children of the world. This is the important work that the Children's Defense Fund has been doing for a very long time.

Children's activist and founder of the Children's Defense Fund, Marian Wright Edelman, wrote a book she titled, *The Sea is So Wide and My Boat is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation*. The book is a collection of open letters that she penned: A Letter to Parents, A Letter to Teachers, A Letter to Neighbors and Community Leaders, A Letter to Young People, and even a Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King. I would like to close today by sharing excerpts of her Letter to Faith Leaders.

The letter begins with several texts from different faith traditions. This one, from an ancient Jewish book of midrash resonated with me:

Why was there violence in Gilead?

Because they made what is primary secondary and what is secondary primary. How so? Because they loved their possessions more than their own children.

~Midrash Tanhuma, Mattot

From A Letter to Faith Leaders:

I am a child of the black church—the granddaughter, daughter, sister, and aunt of Baptist ministers. Justice for children and the poor is my ministry because that was what all the Wright children were taught by our parents, church, community, and elders.

When I was growing up, the church was the hub of child and community activity. As a black child I couldn't play in public parks or sit down for a soft drink at a drugstore lunch counter, so my daddy and mama built a playground behind our church with a skating rink and snack bar. Black community members gathered at our church to hear Joe Louis's boxing matches on the radio and boys, hoping to become the next heavyweight boxing champion of the world, could experience the racial barrier shattering through will and skill. The church was a lifeline of help and hope for young and old alike, filling in the gaps for many families struggling to survive in our rural, poor, and segregated community. It did not matter whether you were a church member: if you were a child or an adult with a need, Daddy welcomed all...

And then:

...A theologian friend, Dr. Eileen Lindner, shared the story of taking her car to a Jiffy Lube for servicing. Not having anything to read, she picked up a manual on the coffee table about boating. A chapter on the rules for what happens when boats encounter one another on the open sea described two kinds of craft: burdened and privileged. The craft with

power that can accelerate and push its way through the waves, change direction, and stop on demand is the burdened one. The craft dependent on the forces of nature, wind, tide, and human effort to keep going is the privileged craft. Since powerful boats can make their way forward under their own power, they are burdened with responsibility to give the right of way to the powerless or privileged vessels dependent on the vagaries of the tide, wind, and weather. "Who wrote this thing?" Eileen asked. "Billy Graham? Mother Teresa? What's going on in our land when the New Jersey State Department of Transportation knows that the powerful must give way if the powerless are to make safe harbor and the government of the United States and the Church of Jesus Christ and other people of God are having trouble with the concept?"

The letter ends with this prayer:

O God, please save our children because they are so small.

O God, please save our children because they are so weak and defenseless.

O God, please save our children because so many are neglected and abused.

O God, please save our children because so many are ravaged by hunger and sickness.

O God, please save our children because so many are killed by violence and war and poverty and dirty water.

O God, please save our children who are abandoned by adults and cannot save themselves.

O God, please speak for our children whose cries are unheard and whose silent tears are ignored.

O God, please stand for our children in a world of adults who stand against them.

O God, please open the hardened hearts and eyes of all who resist knowing and doing what knowing compels to heal the hurting young in our world.

Today we celebrate the children we have the honor of walking with, knowing, and loving well face to face. Let us, together, recommit ourselves to our responsibility to the world's children, for the sea is so wide and their boats are so small. Amen.