

October 13, 2019 • Children's Sabbath

"Joyful Gratitude"

Sermon by Tricia Guerrero



Psalm 66:1-12

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.

Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." Selah

Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him,

who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations— let the rebellious not exalt themselves. Selah

Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,

who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

Today is Children's Sabbath, a day set aside to celebrate children as an active part in the life of the church. Disciples come in all ages and our children are indeed disciples, followers of Jesus.

In getting ready for today, our children and families have done a lot of planning, practicing, preparing. It's a big day and we all wanted to be ready!

But have you ever had it happen - where you were planning a big event, a party or fundraiser or something that you wanted to be a success - and then had that dream - the one where the event happens, but everything goes wrong?

I had that dream this past week - I dreamt that the day for Children's Sabbath came and the children and I arrived in the sanctuary on Sunday morning but nothing was ready, the notebook with what they were going to say had disappeared, and to top it off, there were Christmas decorations all over the chancel and in front of the lectern that made it impossible to move around - the kids had to jump over flowers and decorations just to get up here to speak. I woke up feeling very stressed and panicked, but also relieved that it was only a dream.

While I laughed at myself for the dream, I kept remembering all of you staring up here while the kids and I were running in circles and looking at each other trying to figure out what to do and what to say... I couldn't shake the memory of my dream. As I reflected on the power of my feelings from this dream, I realized my fear was rooted in expectations of perfection - that worship must go perfectly smooth without any mistakes or it's a disaster.

Wow, that was a wakeup call. Worship is not a show - it is the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus told us the two most important commandments. First we are to love God with our entire being and second, we are to love our neighbor. The second emerges out of the first, and the first command, to love God is defined in the act of worship.

Worship can have many different looks and styles, but it is in the midst of giving praise and thanksgiving (along with the full spectrum of our experiences), it is here that we encounter the living God, who is revealed to us in the person of Jesus and by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Worship is about loving God and being in relationship with God, as we are, in our imperfect and messy lives.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." He didn't say "once the children are clean, can fully read, aren't sick, are happy and smiling, etc - then they can come to me." No, he just said, "Let them come." Come as they are - right here, right now.

What a beautiful reminder for us too! Jesus models how WE are to welcome children in our midst here in the church community - to love them and care for them as they learn and grow in God's love.

This is why we have added Messy Church... another way for families and our community to worship. We gather once a month on Saturdays, we worship with games and crafts in Simkins Hall, with music, a Bible story and prayer in the chapel, and then share a meal together. During the sermon - or story time - we invite the children to participate and have an active role in sharing the good news. They learn not only that they belong in church, but that they have an important role in leading worship as well.

All of these things together have created a joyful community where worship means building legos and chasing bubbles is just as much worship as anything else. It's a way to learn about God's love, to be present with one another in community, and to give thanks for God's world and the joy it brings us.

When we take the time to listen and learn from our children, we are all reminded of Jesus' welcome to each of us - come to me. Not come to me when you haven't made any mistakes or when you lose 10 pounds or when you feel happier or when you aren't so busy - Jesus just says, come to me.

As we watch the children come up here today, being brave and imperfect - trusting us enough to stand up here and speak, and to share their faith - we learn from them and we too are challenged to walk in this way. To walk with confidence and assurance that we, too, are children of God who can shout with joy and give thanks to God in perfectly messy ways.

At our UMW Game Day a few weeks ago, I heard a story from one of the women who attended. She told me about something that happened in her church's Sunday School class. One day the Sunday School teacher gave the kids an activity: they were to write what they were thankful for... she got many of the classic ones like: family, friends, pets, my home. Then one little child said, the Earth.

The Sunday school teacher asked the little child why they were thankful for the Earth. The child replied, "Because God gave it to us and it gives us a home, we should say thank you." This child reminds us all to say thank you to God - for the small things and for the really big things like the Earth, our home.

Our Psalm today says to "shout joyfully... and to "give praises to God." Our children show us the way to do this. Jesus tells us that God's kingdom belongs to them. Their presence brings us closer to God, to the joy and love that comes as we align our hearts, minds and our lives with God's dream for us and our world.

Greta Thunberg, 16 year old climate and environmental activist, reminds us by saying, "You are never too small to make a difference." Today we give thanks for our children. I give thanks for the truth in Greta's words and for the gift we are given today in our Children's Sabbath. Amen.