

## “God’s Children Now”

Rev. Dr. Peter Bynum

Children’s Sabbath

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<sup>1</sup>See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

<sup>4</sup>Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup>You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup>No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup>Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. (1 John 3:1-7)

No matter how old we are, how old we get, we will always be God’s children. It’s an important lesson, given how hard we work to achieve and claim so-called “maturity.” We put great value on the wisdom that experience gives us, the capacity to make rational adult choices, the development of intellect and common sense that one can only live into over time. To grow up, to learn the ways of the world, to act with reason and accountability – we learn to strive for these good and worthy things.

But then we see Jesus call a child who has none of this knowledge to come and take a special place with him. “Let the little children come to me,” Jesus says. “Do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”<sup>1</sup> Maturity, it seems, is all well and good, but there is something about the life of faith that wants us to remain “childlike” in certain ways – not “childish,” but “childlike.” As Christ says, we are not supposed to stop being God’s children – in fact, we are God’s children even **now**.

On this Children’s Sabbath it seems right for us to pause and think about that. In what ways does God want us to remain childlike in our spirits and in our faith? If we are called to seek the kingdom of God as a little child, what does that mean for us?

I think we can begin with **trust**. Trust is something that children do instinctively and intuitively. In his book, Holy Sweat, author Tim Hansel described a hike that he once took with his son Zac. They were bouldering, climbing around on big rocks, and at one point, Tim heard his son call out from way up on a huge boulder, “Hey Dad! Catch me!”

Tim turned around and looked up, only to see Zac already plummeting joyfully down toward him. Zac had not even waited for an answer from his dad. He just jumped. Fortunately, Tim was close enough and nimble enough to get himself between his son and the ground just in the nick of time. It took him a minute to process what had just occurred. As an adult, he couldn’t help to ponder what could have happened if he had not reacted in

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:14-15.



time. Finally, he gathered himself enough to blurt out, “Zac! Can you give me one good reason why you did that?!?”

His son wasn’t fazed at all. “Sure,” he said with a huge smile on this face, “because you’re my dad.”<sup>2</sup>

Childlike trust knows that God is there, ready to catch us at every instance. Childlike trust proclaims with the psalmist, “*My hope is from [God]. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.. Trust in [God] at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.*”<sup>3</sup> Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God with childlike trust may not ever enter it.

Another aspect of childlike faith is found in the way that children ***know instinctively that they are cherished***. At least, that is how it should be. Childhood should be a time when our self-esteem is a given. Far too many children have this innocence stripped away far too early, but we all know what the healthy, hopeful pattern is – that we learn from our parents from a very early age that we are worthy of love, or – even better – that we are loved even when we do not feel worthy of love.

I once heard the preacher Tony Campolo tell a story about a father who lived in a small Midwestern town. The man had a daughter, Janice, who couldn’t have been more than four or five. One morning, a huge thunderstorm came over the house – the kind where the flashes of lightning are almost immediately followed by massive thunder claps that seem to be right on top of you, booms that rattle the walls and make your hair stand on end. This was the biggest storm he could remember, and he thought his daughter might be scared. He hopped out of bed and ran upstairs to check on her. When he opened the door to her room, she was standing on the windowsill, pressing as much of her body as she could up to the glass. Rain was pelting the panes and huge flashes of light were popping everywhere. He said, “Janice, *what are you doing?!*”

She said, “*Hold on, dad, I think God is trying to take my picture!*”

When we have childlike faith, we do not spend time worrying about whether we are worthy. Childlike faith knows instinctively that we are precious in God’s sight, and that nothing we have done, and nothing we may ever do, will ever limit God’s love for us. “*Do not fear,*” God says through the prophet Isaiah, “*for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*”<sup>4</sup> God wants us to hold fast to the truth that we are loved – to embrace it easily, completely, and without question, just like a little child would.

Last, but certainly not least, childlike faith understands what ***love*** really is. Too often, we assume that children don’t really “get” love, that they have to live a while before they will really understand it. But the truth is that kids may actually see love, and understand love, even better than mature people do. Not too long ago a group of researchers asked kids between the ages of 5 and 10 what they thought of love, and the answers they got were very revealing. For example, Arnold, age 10, was asked about how

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<sup>2</sup> “Trust,” <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/trust.htm>, October 17, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 62:5-8.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 43:1-3.

people act when they are in love. He said, *"You know they are in love when they act mooshy, like puppy dogs... except puppy dogs don't wag their tails nearly as much."*

When asked how they could tell if two people were married, one six-year-old said, *"Married people usually look happy to talk to other people."* But then his 8-year old friend added, *"You might have to guess based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids."*

To the question, "How do you find someone to love?" two answers stood out. One child said, *"If you want to be loved by somebody who isn't already in your family, it doesn't hurt to be beautiful."* But another said, *"Beauty is skin deep. But how rich you are can last a long time."*

Staying in love may be the real trick, some say. But kids seem to get that, too. When asked how people keep love alive, one little boy said, *"One of you should know how to write a check. Because, even if you have tons of love, there is still going to be a lot of bills."*

His friend quickly added, *"And don't forget your wife's name. That will mess up the love."<sup>5</sup>*

Clearly, in one sense, the study proved the old adage that kids will "say the darndest things." But in a much deeper way, the study showed that children understand way more than just the funny nuances of adult relationships. With open and untainted hearts... through clear and unfiltered observation... with wonder, awe, and deep appreciation, the children in that study proved that they know more than enough to answer the simple question "What is love?" ...

*"Love is when you go out to eat and you give somebody most of your french fries without making them give you any of theirs."*

*"Love is when a puppy licks your face, even after you left him alone all day."*

*"Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."*

*Love is "[w]hen you tell someone something bad about yourself and you're scared they won't love you anymore. But then you get surprised because not only do they still love you, they love you even more."*

*"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth."*

*"When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love."<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> The quotes above are all listed in "Kids say the darndest things: Kids' Ideas About Love," <http://entertainmentquotes.tribe.net>, posted October 24, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> "Funny Things Kids Say About Love," <https://www.romancestuck.com/quotes/kids-quotes.htm>, January 28, 2016.

To trust without question, to believe and to know that God cherishes us no matter what, to understand how love really operates in the world... this is what it means to seek the kingdom of God as a little child. *“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.”*

Not just then. Not maybe in the future. *“Beloved, we are God’s children **now**,”* and thanks be to God for that.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**