

“Kids These Days” June 7, 2009

Have you ever noticed just how much kids seem to know that you and I have forgotten? I'm sure we've all seen some of the gems of wisdom that children can bestow upon us, like the 10-year-old, who said, “Never trust your dog to watch your food.” We can see the outright honesty in the little boy who said in his night time prayers: “God, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a good time like I am.”

Now those are not necessarily the kind of wisdom kids can help us adults with, but I really believe there's a lot you and I can learn from them, if we are willing. The problem is that some of us are not very willing to allow that to happen.

One of the comments I sometimes hear from folks is, “What's the matter with kids today?” Then usually the questioner launches into all the things they see as wrong about the younger generations—things ranging from being disrespectful, to being spoiled by all the technology and “stuff” at their disposal, to lacking moral fiber, and more.

I haven't really researched this to know for sure, but I have a hunch that similar kinds of things have been said about virtually every younger generation. Maybe it's because we think the generations that follow us have it easier than we did, and we see kids today having opportunities that simply didn't exist when we were kids. Therefore, we often assume that they're spoiled, or that what they have is in some way bad. Maybe we get caught up in all the negative news, and see all the bad stuff, so we think that kind of things applies to all young people. Or we talk about lowered test scores, and the shrinking of our brain pool, and think our future is in jeopardy.

However, I wonder if we aren't mostly making some sweeping generalizations that we can't totally substantiate. Actually, I'm not sure there's anything “wrong” with kids today, especially anything much different from what was considered to be “wrong” decades ago. Kids are just trying to figure out how to make their way through the world that you and I have created for them, and that's different from what it used to be. Nonetheless, I don't think any of us is in a position to judge that it's better or worse than earlier times....just different

And, the more I think about it, the more I think that our world would be a whole lot better if we listened more to our kids, and talked less. Maybe we'd be better off in the long run if we took the perspective of learning from our kids, rather than focusing on lecturing or trying to control them. Frankly, children have a lot to teach us solely by

being kids, but we don't always honor and respect what we can learn from them.

I really believe our children can teach us a lot, and maybe our Bible passage may be a good starting place for exploring that notion. This is a story we find in the very earliest gospel, and it's about the Jewish tradition of the time of bringing children to a distinguished rabbi, or teacher, to that they might be blessed. Our passage puts it like this: **Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. When Jesus noticed this, he was angry, and said to his disciples, “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.**

Clearly the story tells us that the disciples thought the children would be bothering Jesus, so they tried to keep them away, but Jesus' response was very different from theirs. He welcomed the children, held them in his arms, and blessed them. And he tried to help his disciples, and us, understand something quite important: when it comes to a deep relationship with God, children have it all over us! He said, **“whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.”**

It's probably helpful to understand what Jesus meant by using the words “kingdom of God.” There are really two dimensions to the term: one part refers to the ultimate state of being with God forever after life on this earth is ended. The other sense of the term is used to describe fullness of life here and now. I think for Jesus, fullness of life has to do with living life creatively, being filled with a sense of wonder and adventure; it's a life filled with spontaneity and trust—things that are innately childlike.

The authors of *The Creative Spirit* describe it this way: **“For the child, life is a creative adventure.”** What is implicit in this nugget from Jesus is that, unless we adults re-capture that sense of adventure, of curiosity and wonder, of spontaneity and trust, we will be unable to experience the life God wants for us, and the close relationship with God that God desires.

Most of us would probably have to admit that our lives get pretty complicated at times, and I suspect many of us would like revert to the simplicity of our childhood. One unknown author tried to describe that kind of thing by tendering his resignation as an adult. In his willingness to quit being an adult and accept the responsibilities of an 8-year-old again, he said:

I want to go to McDonald's and think that it's a four star restaurant.

I want to sail sticks across a fresh mud puddle and make ripples with rocks.

I want to think M&M's are better than money because you can eat them.

I want to lie under a big oak tree and run a lemonade stand with my friends on a hot summer day.

I want to return to a time when life was simple, and all you knew were colors, multiplication tables and nursery rhymes, and that didn't bother you.

I want to think that the world is fair, that everyone is honest and good, and I want to believe that anything is possible.

I want to be oblivious to the complexities of life and be excited by the little things again.

I want to believe in the power of smiles, hugs, a kind word, truth, justice, peace, dreams, the imagination, humankind, and making angels in the snow.

I think that writer does a good job of capturing the kind of innocence, simplicity, openness, wonder and trust that children possess, but we adults too often lose. Wouldn't it be something if we could live our lives more the way children live theirs?

Harry Connick Jr shared a time of revelation about all this when his oldest child was two-years-old. The two of them were headed to the park, and Connick said he only had a couple of hours to spare before he had to be somewhere. So, as he was rushing his daughter along to the car, she stopped, bent down and picked up a rock. He kept telling her, "Come on, we gotta' go." He said it didn't occur to him that she was in the midst of an amazing discovery right at that very moment; she was discovering the uniqueness of a rock that he hadn't even seen. He said, "My daughter and I didn't end up going to the park that day; we just hung out in the driveway looking at rocks."

Connick learned, I think, part of the gift that Jesus wanted us to know—that living in the moment the way a child does can cause us to look at the world with entirely new eyes—more with the eyes of a child, eyes open to see the wonders around us. You may recall that Robert Fulghum's book, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, and how it named some of the basic things that children innately know. One essential one is the ability to live in the moment, being filled with a sense of wonder. Fulghum said that the Dick and Jane readers taught us a very important word: LOOK. When we look around, we can't help but be filled with a sense of wonder, so that's part of what Jesus is talking about, I think.

One that he wrote about that's really important in my mind is this one: **"It is still true, no matter how old you are—when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together."** How important that is at every age and stage of life! We need one another, and it's better to go through

life holding one another's hands that to go it totally alone.

Children do that naturally, and they seem to know how essential it is to be there for others. I read an article about a 13-year-old by the name of Spencer Whale, who spent a lot of time in hospitals because of his mother's heart ailments. When there, he often saw children who were patients pedaling the wards in toy cars, with their parents jogging along beside them holding the I-V pole. He said, "I wondered why anyone hasn't thought to attach an I-V pole to the pedal cars.

So he solicited donations of pedal cars and I-V poles, and found volunteers to do the welding, and this resulted in "The KidCare Ride Toy," which is in use at the Mineola, New York's Winthrop University Hospital. He said, "We can't help that they are sick, but at least we can help them have more fun." That's holding hands when we're out in the world, and sticking together, and children can help us with that.

Children can teach us so much, but the one that they model so genuinely is trust—that particularly unique childlike trust. Small children are totally reliant on others for their well-being, trusting that food will be supplied when they're hungry, that every basic need will be met. Trust like that mostly continues to be part of our lives unless and until some human being lets us down, and then that trust is broken, and has to be regained.

Our Bible passage wants us to understand that we can put our trust where it will never fail us or let us down. We can put our trust in God, because God is the one who is always with us, and who will never abandon us. God is the one we can always count on—the one we can depend on totally and completely.

Children can give us so very much, and help us live our lives more the way God would have us, if we're willing to learn from them, and open ourselves to all life has to offer. It's about seeing the world with eyes of wonder; it's about sticking together and helping one another; it's about trust—trusting one another and trusting one.

Closing:

I really like something Rachel Carson wrote about the gift that we want children to possess always. She said, **"If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life."**

That would be my prayer for every one of us: that life not beat us down, that we re-discover the gift of wonder, that we hold hands and stick together, and that we always, always put our trust in God.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.

