

Sharing the Blessing: Child Dedication Reflection
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Deuteronomy 6:4-9, NRSV

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷ Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹ and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Mark 10: 13-16, NRSV

¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

It is such a joy to be part of this service this morning. It has been months since there have been children present in person at worship here at NPMC, and I know I miss them! I miss their little voices and outbursts and interruptions. I miss having them sit and talk with me during children’s time. Children are an integral part of this faith community, and I think often of the children of this congregation. And this morning, we get to have one of them here – baby Casey, one of the newest little ones to join our faith family. Thank-you, Sarah and Mackenzie, for sharing him with us today!

The Bible speaks a lot about the ups and downs of birth and raising children. I remember an episode of the TV show *Modern Family* when the one couple, Mitch and Cam, are in the process of adopting a baby. It’s a rocky process, with one adoption falling through, and then the chance of another one coming up suddenly. “Who is this God” who is allowing their adoption process to be so rocky, so full of ups and downs? Mitch wonders at one point. And his partner Cam, pointing out the stories of Jesus’ highly unusual conception and birth, baby Moses floating down the Nile river in a basket, and Abraham’s attempted-sacrifice of his son Isaac, replies, “God only does weird baby stuff!”

Jokes aside, the Bible really does speak of children more than we might expect. Our Scripture passages for today are each about the connection between faith and the

raising of children. Our passage from Deuteronomy 6 is the classic text about living into God's ways. It begins with the most central prayer of the Jewish tradition, the "Shema" or "Hear O Israel," about loving God with all one's heart, soul, and might – loving God with one's whole self and one's whole life. And part of living out this faith is passing it on to the children in our lives, whether we are parents or aunts or uncles, or mentors or caregivers or grandparents to them. We are to "recite" the stories and teachings and wisdom of our faith to these children, to "talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise." Morning and night, wherever we are, as we live into our faith, we are teaching the children in our lives to do the same, by our example and words. This includes our example and words in our life together as a faith community, which serves as a witness to the children of this faith community, an encouragement for them to live lives of faith and make the decision to become baptised when they are old enough to do so.

But, we might ask, why do we do this? Do we do this to simply pass along the tradition that has been passed to us? Do we do this simply because it's "always" been done this way? I hope we don't do this in an effort to try and have the children become just like us adults! No, we do this because of what happens in Mark 10, in the story of Jesus blessing the children. It begins, as we know, with people bringing their little children to Jesus. But the disciples are somehow under the impression that this is inappropriate, that Jesus and his ministry are much too important for children to be involved with. So they are trying to shoo these children away from Jesus, to prevent them from bothering him. And when Jesus catches on to what they are doing, he gets angry! The NRSV says, "he was indignant, and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; 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.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:14-16). Not only are the children included in Jesus' ministry, they are central to it! In the upside-down kingdom or kin-dom or reign of God, the little children are actually the most important ones, the ones most deserving of the Divine blessing. And following Jesus' example, we teach our children the faith in the hopes that it will be a blessing to

them. We pass on the faith that we have experienced as a blessing in the hope that it will bless them, too.

We are living in a time when the birth of a child is both an incredibly hopeful and daunting event. Parenting has always involved that mix between joy and risk, love and worry. And both of these seem more intense as we make our way through this pandemic. I know I have been encouraged by the joyful events that are still happening in our faith community, as you can see on our virtual “Weddings and Babes” page on the church website that took the place of our in-person wedding and baby shower at the church building this year. Plans may have changed and things may seem different than before, but these celebrations of love and new life are still happening among us. As Sarah and Mackenzie’s family has shown us today, raising a child continues to be an act of faith in the God of Life, and an act embodying hope in the future. Thanks be to God for this blessing. AMEN