

9/4/11

**THE PRAYER OF THE DAY** O God, you have called us as your children in creation, and secured our inheritance through the death and rising of our brother and Savior, Jesus, Your only Son. Help us to protect your little ones, and to live for you with a child like faith; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON** Ezekiel 33:7-9

*(A prophet must warn the people.)*

7 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 9 But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.

**THE EPISTLE LESSON** Romans 13:1-10

*(God provides guidance for His people to live as His children, in society and church.)*

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

**THE GOSPEL LESSON** Matthew 18:1-14

*(Children are precious to God.)*

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: **"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you**

**will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. 6 But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.**

7 "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! 8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. 10 **"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. 11**

12 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. **14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.**

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

Last Sunday a delegation from our church went to the Palmer Correctional Center to lead worship. This may not be a surprise because in October we will have been leading jail worship for 20 years. However, in some ways it may be a surprise. “Why spend time with criminals?” some may ask. What did they do to deserve our attention. Well, in Matthew 25 Jesus says, “**I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was in prison and you visited me.**” Jesus calls us to care for and love all people, especially those who may be unable to help themselves. So, we serve prisoners, even though that may be a surprise.

I. The people of Jesus’ time were surprised by Jesus lesson in today’s reading.

A. They were worried about who might be greatest among the grown men who were disciples, and Jesus pointed them to some of the lowest in the culture of that time, the children.

1. Maybe you’ve heard people say, more in previous days than today, “Children are to be seen and not heard.”

2. That is not so much the view today, maybe more in my parents’ day. But, in Jesus’ day this was the way people especially thought.

3. Children could not do much. They had few rights. They were looked on in many ways as unimportant.

B. So Jesus surprises the people of his day. He doesn’t just call the people of his time to care for the children, but he talks about God’s surprising love for the children who were considered so lowly.

1. In verse 10 we are told, “**See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.**”

a. Jesus is saying that children have their own angels, guardian angels.

b. God’s special care for children shows in heaven, in that their angels have special privileges that others don’t have.

c. Do you see how special children are to God, and how he cares for those thought to be unimportant?

2. Then, in verse 14, after Jesus tells the story of the lost sheep, he concludes by saying, **14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.**

1. In Luke 15 Jesus describes God’s surprising love as being like a shepherd that goes seeking the lost, even the prostitutes and tax collectors.

2. The parallel to that parable is this one. The shepherd goes seeking lost, especially children.

3. What is even more surprising is that this shepherd is Jesus himself, and this parable says that a special target of Jesus’ saving love is the little ones, the children, those who are unable to take care of themselves.

C. Some may be surprised that we spend time caring for prisoners. Do you see how Jesus surprised the people of His time by telling them that God had such extra special care for little children?

II. In the 70’s I was with a friend in St. Louis. His dad was in town for a Lutheran Layman’s League leaders meeting. We went to a hotel and Oswald Hoffmann was there at the hotel. As his dad was introducing us to this famous Christian radio speaker, a homeless person came up and started giving us his story. Dr. Hoffmann did not ask questions or grill the person, he

looked him in the eye, put his hand in his pocket and took out his wallet, put his hand on the man's shoulders and gave him a \$20.00 bill. A \$20.00 in those days is like a \$50.00 bill today. Now, I've known people who don't like to be bothered by the needy. But, Dr. Hoffman impressed me. If this famous and important man cared about the down and out, shouldn't we, shouldn't I?

A. That is Jesus' line of reasoning with the people of His day. "Do you see how much God Himself cares for these seemingly unimportant little children? If God cares for them, we should too."

B. Jesus tells the people of his day not to lead a child astray or harm a child.

1. In verse 6 He says, **6 But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.**

2. Think of what this says about so many issues today.

A. This impacts what children should watch on TV, or read. We don't want them led into sin.

B. This speaks to us about issues like child abuse or abortion.

C. God wants children kept from sin and from harm.

C. Jesus doesn't just say don't harm children, he also calls us to care for children.

1. Verse 5 says, "And **whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.**

2. Please realize Jesus is not just speaking about people taking care of their own children. We are to care for all children because God cares for them.

A. What a blessing it is then when a church offers Sunday School, or VBS, or Confirmation. It is great when someone who is a parent teaches.

But, what a blessing when someone teaches more than just their children.

What a blessing when someone who no longer has kids at home teaches.

B. Or, what about people who take in foster children, or adopt, or sponsor children overseas or are simply watching out for all the kids in town.

C. A lady who belonged to our church since the 50's was named Val Holtom. Val lived out Plumbley Road in the Butte. Val came down with cancer, and it was terminal. When I went to visit her she was writing a letter. She pointed at the pictures of 6 children on her coffee table. I'm writing the people from Compassion International and asking them to find other sponsors for my children, because I won't be alive to do it anymore.

D. We are to welcome children like we would welcome God himself.

**CONCLUSION** - Last winter a member family of our congregation was driving out near Big Lake in the cold winter at night when they came across some folks walking along the road. Their vehicle had given out. It was quite a ways to a place of warmth. Our members could have driven on by. Hitchhikers are not always known to those who pick them up. There are possible dangers. They could have just ignored these people they didn't know. But, our members stopped and picked the folks up. The walkers were approaching hypothermia. The ride saved them.

Even today children may seem unimportant. They may be children who dress funny, or

misbehave. They may be someone else's children or grandchildren. However, God loves the vulnerable. He loves children in a special way. If God loves them, we should too. In so doing we are loving others just like God loved us. And, it might save them for everlasting life.

## THANKS

Megan and Jason Nystrom - new baby Mackenzie May Nystrom, born September 2

## GRIEVING

### ILL

- Rod Grosz
- Charlene Petrie?
- Deo Keil - Lung CA
- Jerry and Aedene Arthur
- Joe Maddy
- Lyla Cornelius
- Vi Folsom
- Thomas Sullivan
- **LeRoy Jenson**
- Anna Mae Shackelford
- Others . . . on our hearts and minds

### COUNTRY

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- Safety for those Serving in Harm's Way  
Andrea Falkenburg

### Church

- Persecuted Christians

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