

Give Thanks: For Children

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – November 24 2024

Thanksgiving/Christ the King Sunday

Readings: Proverbs 4:1-9; Galatians 4:1-7; Mark 10:13-16 NRSVue

Reflection: Psalm 103

Greeting: We waited like patient children to be made righteous by faith in Christ. We are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. All who were baptized into Christ have been clothed in glory with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise of God's love. (Galatians 3)

Prayer: Almighty God, we give thanks for your presence with us as we join together by your grace and mercy. We are thankful this day for the children in our lives, and the many blessings that they remind us of. We give thanks for your steadfast love and faithfulness that are with us all the days of our lives. We put our trust in your word and your ways, that you may lead us in the path of righteousness. May you watch over us, Heavenly Father, and protect us from harm. May your Holy Spirit guide us in gentleness. And may we always be reminded of the example set for us by your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. May we always give thanks that you are our God and we are your people. Let us worship this day in a spirit of truth as we grow by your wisdom and your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 103

⁸ The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. ¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

(Psalm 103:8-13 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 103, and we hear of God's grace for us. That just as a parent has compassion for their children, God will have compassion for us. That we are loved and we are cared for. How are you giving thanks this week? Are you thankful for the children that are in your life? As we gather for Thanksgiving this week, what are some ways you can be thankful for the steadfast love of the Lord? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? How can you show others that you are thankful that they are in your life? What can we do to celebrate the love of Christ as we give thanks?

Prayer: O God, our guide and our guardian. We are thankful that you hear us as we lift up our prayers before you. We know that you are with us day in and day out, and that you never leave us. We give thanks to you especially for the children in our lives that remind us of your blessing. Help us to always be a people with hearts full of gratitude for the many blessings that we have in this life. We come before you this day with the joys that we have lifted up together. We turn to you with the troubles that we name together. But we also have celebrations and worries that we hold silently within our hearts. But you know our hearts Lord, and you hear the prayers that we share together on this day. May your steadfast love and faithfulness strengthen us in our mourning and our gladness. May we know that your presence is felt in our laughter and our tears. And may we always remember that you are there for us in all things. It is with grateful hearts that we remember your mercy and grace, demonstrated through the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition. Our first reading is from Proverbs chapter 4, verses 1 through 9.

¹ Listen, children, to a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, ² for I give you good precepts: do not forsake my teaching. ³ When I was a son with my father, tender and my mother's favorite, ⁴ he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live. ⁵ Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. ⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. ⁷ The beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight. ⁸ Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. ⁹ She will place on your head a fair garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown." (Proverbs 4:1-9 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from Galatians chapter 4, verse 1 through 7.

¹ My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than those who are enslaved, though they are the owners of all the property, ² but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. ³ So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir through God. (Galatians 4:1-7 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 10, verse 13 through 16.

¹³ People were bringing 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 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. (Mark 10:13-16 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This is the last week of our Give Thanks series, and this week we talk about being thankful for children. And this one was an easy one to think about because I think about my own children and how thankful I am for them and my life. But I wanted to think about the ways that Scripture tells us that we should think about children because it gives us some unique ways to look at all the different ways that we are thankful for the children in our lives and for the example they set. And I do mean that with the example that they set. It's easy to think that because we are talking about children that they will be following the example set by others. Which is true in some sense. It's especially true if you have ever been at a baptism and made that commitment to help that person to grow in Christ. But I was thinking about the way that Jesus sees children. And it really got me to thinking about one of the ways that kids remind us of what really matters.

And so, of course, I start with our reading from Mark. And it's because the disciples are getting really upset at people bringing children to Jesus to have them be blessed. And I can imagine Jesus bristling at the disciples trying to tell people to go away and not bring their children to him. Jesus chides the disciples and says that they should let the children come to him because the kingdom of God belongs to them. He then says something that can be hard for us to fully process if we are always looking at children as people who learn from us. Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. It is good for us to ask what exactly this is supposed to mean. Does it mean we act foolish? I don't think it is about being foolish. I look around at our children and don't see them being foolish. So, how do we live into this command? What does it mean to be like a child? Well, we have to ask what it is about children that makes them uniquely qualified to enter God's kingdom. Children are curious little creatures. They ask a lot of questions. They want to know about things. They want details. However, children are also good at accepting things as they are. They can hear a truth and accept it as the truth. Part of what Jesus is telling us here is that sometimes we can overthink think things and make things overly complex. I think that is why stories about good guys and bad guys appeal to kids. Because they can understand good and evil better. Because they can allow themselves to think about them without the layers that we sometimes put on top. Jesus is telling us that we can let go of some of that complexity to understand the basics that we need to know. Like that it is right to do good. I'm thankful for my children for reminding me of this. Because they can often think about things in much simpler terms than I can. And when they do, I'm a little humbled because it means that I got distracted by details and they could see the big picture. They could see the things I couldn't.

When we hear from Paul, Paul is considering what it is like to be a child of God. Paul thinks about what it means to be adopted as an heir and a child into the family of Christ. That simply being the one that inherits isn't the same as being a child. Because one is simply a legal designation. The heir is the one that gets the stuff and continues on. The connection that we have in Christ is much stronger than that we inherit something. It isn't about just what is left

behind. It is about belonging. I think that we sometimes think about ourselves as heirs and not children. We think about what we inherit in the kingdom of God, but not the way that we are valued. But think about the children in your life. Think about times when maybe some of those close to you were younger. What exactly would you want for those children if you weren't around? Just that they got your things? Or would you want them to also learn the lessons you learned? Would you want someone to step in and adopt them and teach them how to live? To love them and care for them? I think about this with our relationship with God because of the way that God loves us and cares for us. Like children. Not just that there's stuff we are supposed to get, but that we are loved. Just like a child. When we think about God the Father, he knows better than we do. But he doesn't hold it over us. He guides us and leads us. He teaches us. He is there to correct us when we stumble and fall. He is there to love us, even when we do something silly. Because through it all, God is going to share wisdom with us.

We get a strong idea about sharing wisdom from our reading from Proverbs. We hear that "the beginning of wisdom is this, get wisdom. Whatever else you get, get insight." There is this idea that we need to gain wisdom and insight. That they are things we should learn as children so that they are with us all of our days. We teach them to our children so that we cling to them ourselves. Because it is hard to teach wisdom without having a high regard for wisdom yourself. I think sometimes we try to see ourselves as too wise and too insightful to the point that we lose track of what's important. But children have a way of seeing what truly matters. They have a way of looking past all those other little things. And I've noticed this over the years, because you can ask a child what the right thing to do is, and they will look at it solely as what is right and what is wrong. Not with extra political connotations. They don't consider societal structures that bar us from doing the right thing. They often just come to it as it is and hold to what the right thing to do is. They think about what they should do and what they shouldn't do based on this, and I think we could all learn from that.

I'm thankful for my children because they are a reminder to me of God's love. I'm thankful for the children in my life for keeping me grounded. It's easy to get lost in adult things, with adult problems and adult situations, with adult complexities, because we like to overcomplicate our lives. We like to make things harder on ourselves. That we will invent philosophical conundrums that we have to work our way through, and we invent all sorts of situations in which we have to think about things in ways that separate us from what truly matters. That we become so wise that we stop being wise. That we get so hung up on being heirs, we stop being children. And we all too easily become the disciples, shooing away the children because we have more important things to do. I think Jesus welcomed children because they are a stark reminder of how we can live. They're also a stark reminder of the way that we love. And I think that's part of what Jesus saw on that day. That if we follow Christ, we accept the children because we know the children deserve love, deserve our time, that they are an example to us. That we should be an example to them as well. That we should show them how to welcome others, not turn them away. That if we want our children to have wisdom and understanding, we have to spend time with them. If we want them to know that they are loved as children and not just heirs to inherit, we have to show them that kind of love. And I think that's part of what we saw in our gospel readings. Jesus is telling them he wants to bless

the children because he appreciates them. Why shouldn't Jesus bless the children? Jesus blessing the children is like Jesus blessing the future. Jesus wants the children there because they matter, because they should be involved. Because they should hear his words and learn. How else are they going to gain wisdom except by hearing it? How else are they going to know love except by experiencing it? And Jesus invites the children in so that all can remember the simple kind of faith they have and to have that faith themselves.

And so, yes, I am thankful for children on this day. I am thankful for the ways that they continue to teach me and continue to remind me of God's love. That they remind me to be humble. Knowing that I can learn from them. Reminding me that maybe I should listen more than I speak. Reminding me that sometimes the simplest of faith is the best. And they remind me that I can experience joy. I think about those children the disciples tried to turn away. I think of Jesus taking them into his arms and blessing them. Because I know they would have felt loved. They would have felt special. And that is the kind of love I want to experience with my Savior. So let us give thanks for children. For all that they are, for all that they do, for all that they teach us, and all that they remind us of. That we remember we are children of the Most High. That we are loved. That we are welcomed. And that in Christ, we all have a home together. So let us truly give thanks for all the things in our lives that remind us of how to love our risen Savior. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Next Series – Come, Let Us Adore Him

This year our Advent series is “Come, Let Us Adore Him.” We reflect on all that we do to remember the gift of our Savior through old stories, favorite songs, and many traditions. This season we reflect on the Preparations and the Passion of Advent so that we might embrace the Presence and Promise of the Christ who comes. And through it all, we will gather to worship in Joy, remembering the comfort of Home as we prepare to look Ahead. So, come, let us adore him.

12/1: Preparations	12/8: Passion	12/15: Presence	12/22: Promise
12/24: Joy	12/29: Home	1/5: Ahead	

Neoga Grace UMC

752 Walnut
PO Box 610
Neoga, IL 62447
(217)895-2809
Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St
PO Box 267
Toledo, IL 62468
Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd
Mattoon, IL 61938
Worship 9:30am

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