

Sermon for Sunday – September 18, 2022  
Mark 10:13-16

**Prayer:** May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

Parenting has got to be the hardest job on the planet. I was fortunate to meet some amazing parents very early on in my ministry. In the early 80s ministry personnel were hard to find and churches with full time jobs were plenty. In 1985 I was exploring the possibilities of attending seminary and doing what needed to be done to become an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada, but I wasn't sure. Oxbow invited me to be their minister for year – to test drive the idea and I agreed.

One of the most challenging parts of that year was presiding at funerals - as I had only attended 2 funerals in my lifetime. I will be forever grateful for the two women who supervised me and helped me with resources and supported me through all of the challenges. It was while preparing one of the 21 funerals that I did, that I met two extraordinary parents.

The young mother's own mother had become gravely ill and had been hospitalized. During this time the hospitalised woman would not allow her grandchildren to come and see her. She did not want them to remember her as a woman who was ill, but rather wanted them to keep memories of their fun and active times together. As a result, her grandchildren were not able to be with her during her illness, or through her death this was particularly hard on one of the grandchildren.

When I visited with the family, to plan the funeral, one little granddaughter kept popping in and out of the funeral planning time, like a Bunny rabbit on caffeine. As the visit came to a close, I had a chance to chat with the little girl. She told me how sad she was that she wasn't with her grandma in hospital and that she was upset that her grandma didn't want to see her. This is where the wise parents pop into the story they overheard our conversation and asked if there was something the little girl could do during the funeral as she was so desperate to be involved. The young mom thought about a poem the little girl had given to her grandma as a gift and I agreed that she could participate. The little girl was excited and relieved to be given apart in her grandmother's farewell.

The day of the funeral, we no longer had a - bouncing Bunny rabbit on caffeine - but rather a determined and calm little one, intent on reading her poem perfectly for her Grandma.

Before the service started and because the little girl had never been to a funeral before, the parents allowed me to take her up the back stairs so she could see what things looked like. She took my hand as we got to the top of the stairs, she carefully looked at all the flowers, she looked at all the people who had gathered, she looked at the polished wood casket and then she squeezed my hand looked up at me and said it's beautiful and then she smiled.

The smile never left her during the whole beginning of that funeral service. She and I had a secret signal so that if she felt she couldn't read her poem she would just look down at her shoes, and then I would skip by her part - only I and her parents would know she decided not to read. When it came time for her to come up to the front and read her poem - I looked at her and she looked back at me – and there was that smile. I called her up to the front, she stood on the stool behind the pulpit and read her poem like a pro. When she was done, she went back and sat down beside her mother. It was then that the tears began to flow. She had done what she needed to do for her grandmother, she got to do something important, she got to say goodbye and to grieve as she needed.

Thank God for her wise parents who took a huge risk but allowed their daughter to explore death and grief in their supportive care. Parenting is hard and we don't always get it right but sometimes, parents get it perfectly right.

I have met so many amazing parents over the years. Many of them right here at McClure.

Caring for the spiritual life of our children is probably one of the most challenging parts of parenting. Research shows that the most influential people in the spiritual development of children is their parents - in particular their mother. Grandparents rank 4th and the church a distant 11<sup>th</sup> in influence. This indicates to me that if we in the church are to be part of raising healthy, spiritually centred children in this world – one of the important things we as a church must do is care for their parents.

When I talk about nurturing the spiritual health of children, I do not mean creating people who come to church on Sunday morning; though it is nice when it happens. But Spiritual health is about growing people who walk in this world with compassion, with an awareness that the world does not revolve around them but revolves around all of us and all living things. Who appreciates the mystery of life and who live with joy and gratitude. Who know how to lean on others when in need, and how to hold others in their need. Who notice those who are at the edges of society and who work to right injustice. To nurture the spiritual health in children is to give

our children faith – not right believe - but faith: a trust in the inherent goodness and preciousness of life and confidence in a God that holds them through all of life's storms and joys. We do this through connection, through care, through blessing.

Jesus understood the importance of caring for children. Matthew, Mark and Luke include the story we heard this morning in all of their gospels. An indication that this lesson of creating space for and blessing of children is central to the life of all those who claim to be followers of Jesus. Jesus welcomed children, interacted with them and encouraging them in faith. Jesus modeled faithfulness and assures them that they belong. Not only do children belong to God's community but Jesus proclaimed they hold central place. Our challenge as church is to keep blessing. To keep welcoming, interacting and encouraging.

I hope you will allow me to tell you one more story. My kids Isaac and Matthew are of course PK's times two - raised in and around the church. Isaac particularly was involved in Church when I served with St. Martin's. He had lots of friends, good Sunday school teachers and through the Faith Friends program he connected with several members of the church Shelly Rhino, and Derrick Hill were two people he made deep and long-lasting connection. Bob Anderson was also a key person in his life for a long time. When we moved to McClure, Isaac's Sunday morning attendance became less regular, but he still made important connections here this time with Wayne Claypool and Ron McConnell.

It had been almost two years since Isaac had been in church on a Sunday morning but when his grandmother died suddenly - Church was where he wanted to be. He needed to ground himself in his faith again – to connect with what he knew to be true; that in the hard stuff he was not alone.

Our challenge as a church is to keep blessings, to keep welcoming, connecting and encouraging the little ones and their beautiful parents.

May God grant us the wisdom, the persistence and the creativity to continue to be a community of faith for all.

Amen