

## Like a child

Luke 18:15-17

June 29, 2008

I am telling you, grandparenting is all it's cracked up to be! All the clichés you hear about the blessings of being a grandparent are true ...

You raise your children, but you enjoy your grandchildren.

You get to have fun with your grandkids, and then send them home!

You can spoil them all you want, because you're not responsible for the consequences.

And they are always, always glad to see you!

I know some of you have known about this for a long time. You know that grandparenting is one of life's greatest privileges, but it's all new to me!

I am finding that grandparenting is a distinctly different experience from parenting. When you are a parent, you have so much invested, there is so much on the line, so much is at stake. The buck stops with you. This life, this little human life, has been entrusted to you for protection and guidance and reassurance and correction, for nurturing the development of body and character and conscience and soul. It is an enormous responsibility!

You can't rest. You're never "off duty." You can't pull back. And so, because you are so close, because you are so connected, because there is so much at stake, sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees. Sometimes, it may be that you are so focussed on who and what your children should be, that you can have difficulty seeing who and what they are.

But grandparents enjoy enough distance and enough freedom from responsibility to permit them to see. They can see their grandchildren and simply celebrate -- celebrate simply -- who they are ... who they are as their own unique selves, and who they are as children, just children.

So what do we see? What do I see in my grandchildren, in Noah and Jack?

I see dependence, utter dependence. There is so much life and strength and resilience even in little babies, and yet I marvel at their vulnerability and frailty and utter dependence on other human beings to provide them protection and nourishment and comfort and warmth. If we withdraw our hands, if we let go our support, if we fail in our vigilance even for a moment, how helpless they are and how vulnerable to injury and harm.

I see eagerness and delight. Everything is new to a young child, new and interesting and exciting ... and well worth exploring in every possible way -- touching and smelling and tasting! A little child can find such great delight in the simplest of things. (They are surely much wiser than we are!) Jack just loves to look at our two faces in the hallway mirror. Every time he comes to our house, we have to go for a walk and look into that mirror together.

I see acceptance, a ready and warm welcome offered indiscriminately to just about everybody. Jack always smiles when he sees me, but then, he smiles when he sees anybody! I'd like to think he prefers me over everybody else, but that's just not the case. He is prepared to take love from and give love to all kinds of different people.

I see an embrace of intimacy. Little children let you close. They want you close, cheek pressed against cheek, fingers playing with fingers, touching, snuggling, caressing. They don't resist. They don't push you away, not until they're older. They are not threatened by intimacy, but desire it.

I see trust. It is unspoken and even unconscious, but it's there. He stands, taking halting steps, holding onto my hand. If I took my hand away, he would fall in an instant. If I removed my hand from his back he would fall and hit the table. But he doesn't hesitate. He isn't anxious. He ventures into this new and wonderful world with eagerness, even confidence, because I am there, because he can trust me to be there.

Jesus said:

*Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it ...*

He said that as he called to him the children his disciples had been turning away. People were bringing their babies to Jesus, hoping that Jesus would put his hands on them and bless them, but his disciples were scolding them for doing it and doing their best to keep them away from Jesus.

Why did the disciples scold the people for bringing their children? I don't know. I really don't know. But I must admit to some sympathy for the disciples. I am not happy when people or churches make faith and the stories of our faith into something childish.

Something really bothers me when David is portrayed as this frail little boy who defeats the great giant. It turns the story into a fairy tale, instead of what it is, an extraordinary story of God's providence in a difficult situation where success seems unlikely. David was a young man, but a seasoned and capable and resourceful young man. He was an unlikely candidate to challenge the champion of the Philistines, but he wasn't without courage or skill, or faith. He succeeded because he was willing to try, because he was willing to give God what he had and trust God to provide.

The problem with turning Bible stories into children's stories is that when we grow up we have no more use for fairy tales. But the stories are adult stories, and the Bible is very much an adult book, and faith addresses issues and concerns -- social and political and economic and personal and spiritual -- that are at the heart of all we do and all we are as adults. The stories of our faith are about real people, not comic book heroes, real people who know God, in some measure, and are used by God, in some way ... people like us, people who could be us.

So faith is not childish, but it is child-like.

*Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it ...*

Like a child ...

Dependent. Like a child. In every breath, with every step, in times of contentment and in times of danger, in times of joy and in times of sorrow, you are held up, held together, protected and nourished and guided by the grace of God. If God were to take away his hand ...

Eager. Like a child. Faith may almost seem naive, but it has simply rediscovered the child's delight in a mysterious and beautiful world. The world is God's creation and the best things are the simplest things, the things God has made and given us for our enjoyment. Faith expects each and every day, in each and every circumstance, to discover something good.

Welcoming. Like a child. The deeper love grows, the broader it becomes. And the more we learn to discriminate between the path that leads to life and the path that leads to death, the more we refuse to discriminate between people. We open our arms -- like a child, like God -- to anybody.

Embracing intimacy. Like a child. Faith is not afraid of getting close. Faith wants to be close. Faith doesn't keep people or God at a distance, but lets them in, all the way in. And, in the end, that is what faith most longs for: just to be held -- just to be held -- in the embrace of God's love. Just to know God and to be known by God. There is no greater joy!

Trusting. Like a child. Faith lives boldly, hopefully, not afraid to step outside its comfort zones, not afraid to take risks, because God is there. Because, consciously or even unconsciously, you trust God to be there. And God is.

Are you too grown up for that kind of faith? Acknowledging your utter dependence on God? Welcoming each new day and each new experience with eager expectation? Welcoming each different person with ready love? Daring to get close, really close? Trusting God in everything and for everything?

Are you too grown up for that kind of faith? I hope not! Because those who receive the Kingdom of God like a child, do receive the Kingdom and its King, and enjoy all the wondrous delights it and he have in store for us!