

Sunday, January 24, 2016 - Love Does Impossible Things: Parenting

Matthew 19:13-15 CEB/MSG

Marysville UMC

Pastor Jenny Smith

Young kids are hilarious. They're also crazy. But we take the bad with the good, right? I've got to share with you some funny things I've heard in my house the last year...

J: You're such a kind young woman.

I: I'm not a woman! I'm batman!

J: Let's make a toast for your third birthday. What do we all love about this 3 year old?

I: I don't want toast!

J: Why did you close your bedroom door last night?

I: I didn't want Wesley to get out of his crib and walk out.

She was watching the State of the Union address and John Boehner was sitting behind President Obama. She said: "Why isn't that guy clapping?"

One night she was yelling from her room: "Mom....Dad....Jenny....Aaron!"

This message is for all of us. Whether the children in our lives are related to us by blood, birth, choice, accident or friendship, we have children in our lives. Maybe it's a niece or nephew, grandchild, daughter, son, foster child, or a child in your faith community.

We've got these people - babies, preschoolers, 3rd graders, jr high teens, high school youth, college students and those starting life on their own. Still others are adult children who now have their own kids -- and they are gifts to each of us. So we're going to talk about these gifts today. About all the ways these gifts are exhausting and frustrating and full of joy.

Now it's tempting for me to stand up here and share with you some trending parenting techniques or new things to try to have this wonderful relationship with your child. But that's not my job. My job is to survey the current state of parenting - what it looks like to have children in 2016 - and look to the gospel of Jesus Christ and see where they intersect. Here's our fundamental question for today: **How does our faith make a difference in our parenting?**

Just like our conversation on marriage last week - know that you bring some baggage to your relationship with your child. All the ways you related to your parents and family are ingrained in you. If we all do some work to bring that to our awareness, we'd already be moving in a more intentional direction. There will be little things my children will do and I'll find myself being critical or negative and then I'll remember - those are things my parents pointed out in me. It causes me to pause and assess and decide how I really feel about it.

Last week, I spent some time with Melinda Mulvaney, a family and child therapist, who's active here at our church. As we chatted in her office during her lunch hour, she shared her observation on parenting today.

"Parenting gets caught up in the day to day. We have to feed kids, wash clothes, drive them places, day after day after day. It can feel overwhelming. At that point, parenting doesn't become very intentional. It's automatic. Plus we're dealing with our own issues and now there's this child who needs so much attention."

Last year, as we were getting adjusted to Wesley being a part of our family, our mornings were pretty hectic, which I hated. One day, we got home and Isabella announced to her dad, "I went slow this morning and Mom wanted to go fast. That's why she got mad."

It's in those moments, where I don't see my children for the gift they are. They are an obstacle to my agenda. They are a distraction to the things I want to do. Now, I'm pretty early in my parenting journey, but I sense that's not how it has to be.

As Melinda and I talked about the nature of parenting and our faith, one scripture passage kept coming to mind. Matthew 19:13-15: Some people brought children to Jesus so that he would place his hands on them and pray. But the disciples scolded them. 14 "Allow the children to come to me," Jesus said. "Don't forbid them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these children." 15 Then he blessed the children and went away from there.

The Message paraphrase says it this way: God's kingdom is made up of people like these.

The child in your life? **What if they are a doorway to the kingdom of God?** And not just in the "oh, they say such cute and simple things" way. But their spirit, perspective, way of being in the world is intended to show us the very things of God? If we believed that, would we slow down and notice?

We might notice their **trust** -- while cute and naive -- is necessary in our faith journey. Their incredible **curiosity** for what's in the cabinet doors, the sandbox and the next chapter of the book is a sight to behold. And maybe we need that kind of curiosity for the moments of holiness all around us. We'd see their ability to **feel and show every emotion** as a healthy sign of vulnerability and authenticity instead of pushing them down and out of sight, only to see them come out in other ways (usually at bedtime!). A child's **boundless imagination** could become the single greatest gift they give us. As adults, we would remember the capacity to dream impossible things still lies within us. No matter how much we've reasoned everything away, the very things we think could never happen...actually could.

When we hurry our little ones along...when we brush off our teens...when we check out with our phones...are we missing the very kingdom of God?

I usually think parenting is supposed to be me taking her hand and showing her the way. **But what if parenting is allowing our child to take our hand and show us the way to the kingdom of God?**

On Christmas morning about a year ago, Isabella exclaimed, "Mom, Wesley is loving me!" I said, "how do you know?" She replied, "He's looking at me!" Kids are looking at us all the time and loving us. When we look back at them, do we see a chore to get through or a door to the kingdom of God?

Speaking of the kingdom of God, do you think much about where it's located? Many think of the kingdom or realm of God as a location - somewhere out there - in the Bible - or in heaven. But one of the central messages of Jesus was to say the kingdom of God is **here, now, with us, inside of us, it's not out there.** It's something we receive and enter. It can happen during a Tuesday morning breakfast conversation with your child. During a shouting, screaming, testing of wills moment at bedtime. During a conversation about choosing college and a career. In a moment of sheer frustration with your child and you turn to your partner and instead of taking your anger out of them, you sink into their arms as if to say, "we're in this together. This child will not take us down!"

Our spiritual journey is all about learning to see the kingdom of God. **And I think Jesus is saying that if we keep acting like adults, we might miss the very thing he came to give us.**

So may we become students of our children. May we see them with new eyes. And may we give ourselves unending grace for all the times we're too tired to do that. It's okay. Even if you notice a couple times a day, that's a gift to me.

VIDEO: <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/child-like>

Next Steps

No matter the parenting stage you're in - we all need support. It's great to meet someone else, share stories of your current season of parenting and be able to say, "Me too!"

We currently have a playgroup that meets on Wednesdays for infants/toddlers & their parents. A group of families with young children gather once a month for dinner and discussion. Maybe someone wants to start a Parents of Teens group or a group for parents who just sent their child off to college. The groups don't need to last forever - but what a gift they could be for people for just 6 months even. Maybe some of you would love to make it happen. Come chat with me.

And if you want to learn from the kids in our church and walk with them as they grow in their faith, talk to Heather Riggs, our director of family ministries about serving in children's ministry. Get a front row seat to what God is doing in their life and I guarantee you it will inspire your own faith journey as well.

So to the parents in the room - you're doing a good job. Give yourself grace, all the time. You are deeply loved by God and by this church - no matter how your parenting feels at the moment. We want to partner with you and our community so we can all feel stronger and confident in our raising up of these kids. Reach out - ask questions - let's do this together.

They are truly doorways to the kingdom of God for us all. May we learn to truly see it. Amen!