

Date: January 3, 2010

Title: The Children Are the Church

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Scripture:

### **Jesus Blesses the Children**

**13** One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. **14** But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." **15** And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left. Matt 19:13-15 (NLT)

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Well, you might have noticed that we have had a lot of young people helping with our service this morning. I have purposely asked that our kids do as much as possible this morning as a way to draw attention to how vitally important young people are in our church.

Now I know that we will always say that children are an important part of our ministry and in many ways our actions back up our words. We do spend a lot of our resources on the children of our church. We have a section that is set aside for the Sunday school and Children's church activities. We have Metcalfe Hall available and the rest of the rooms in the church for that matter available when we need them for Vacation Bible School. We spend money on Sunday school curriculum and there are a

dedicated group of people who spend time preparing and teaching our young ones. Clearly, the children are an important part of our ministry.

The important questions I have been asking myself and I encourage you to ask as well is this: Are we doing enough for these young people? Where exactly do they fit into our ministry? Are they sort of a side ministry or a major part of what we do? I have been asking myself these questions and I am encouraging you all to really ponder if we are giving our children and youth ministry the kind of energy and emphasis their importance demands. If they're not all that important, then we don't need to worry about it, but if they are important, then maybe we need to spend some time thinking about what we should do about them.

Next Saturday we are going to be getting together right here in the sanctuary to work on this question. We are blessed to have Ronda York leading us in an exploration of our values when it comes to Children's ministry. Among other things, Ronda is the Children and Youth director at SonRise UMC located in Pueblo West. Ronda will be helping us to determine what our values are around Children and Youth ministry so that we can move forward with our ministry in an appropriate way. She has been through this process pretty thoroughly with her church and has graciously volunteered to help us with the same process. I hope that most of you will be able to be here to help us examine this vital part of our ministry. You see, the idea is that we cannot really decide how to accomplish something until we are very clear about what it is we are trying to accomplish. So, I would like to put out a special invitation to 3 specific groups of people: 1. I hope that all of you who have children will come. We are talking about your children. 2. All of you who have had children at one time, we need your wisdom and input. 3. All of you who were children at

one time in your life. We need your personal experience. Was I clear enough on that point – you are all invited!

I started giving all of this some thought when I was hearing from many of the Sunday school teachers how they were concerned that we don't seem to have a lot of children attending Sunday school. Every week the teachers put a lot of effort into planning what to teach and how to teach and many times they have only one child attending the class. This doesn't seem fair to the teachers or to the students. I began to spend time pondering and praying and asking, "God how do you want us to develop our children's ministry?" With all the great things we have going on in this church, is there more we can do to develop our children and youth education programs?

As it often happens just about the time I was pondering all this someone passed a book my way that helped me sharpen my focus about this. The book is called *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* by George Barna. You may know that George Barna is one of those people who use opinion polls to find out what people think and how they act regarding specific topics. He then writes about his findings. In this book, he brings up some pretty interesting points both about how important Children's ministry can be in the overall success of a child's life and about how most churches do the bare minimum when it comes to educating our children. He also has some interesting information about the importance of what children are taught when they are young and what the impact of what they believe has on their overall well being. The simple way to say this is, what children learn and believe about God when they are young can have a dramatic impact upon how they live their lives when they grow up.

Now, I think it's pretty obvious that Jesus wanted us to know this. When we see in our story this morning how Jesus reacted to the children and the

disciples, it's pretty clear that he cared deeply for the children. Jesus knew that it was important for the children to come to him. It must have been an incredibly powerful experience to receive a personal blessing from Jesus himself. I wouldn't be surprised if that one short time spent with Jesus changed the lives of those children forever.

I wouldn't be surprised because in this brief encounter with Jesus, it was actually God who touched these children. The same hands that gave sight to the blind blessed the children. The same voice that brought people back from the dead now blessed the children. I'm pretty sure that Jesus' blessing positively impacted their lives forever.

When we read this bible story, we are looking at something that happened nearly 2000 years ago. That's a long time ago. Do you think that something like that can still happen today? Obviously, Jesus is not walking the earth blessing children in the same way today, but is it still possible for the children to be blessed by Jesus today? Can it still happen?

I'm sure you know what I think. I think, of course it can still happen. It has been happening all along. Wherever young people and the active Body of Christ come together, there exists the potential to impact those young person's lives forever. It may be hard for us to consider it this way, but I believe that the Body of Christ has just as much power to positively impact the life of a young person today as Jesus had in His day.

Now, I hope it's clear that when I am speaking about the Body of Christ I am talking about the church. The church is the living Body of Christ in our day. You and I have the hands that bless and the voice that inspires. We are the ones that have to say to the world, "Let the children come to me." And when the parents bring their children, we have to be sure that indeed

we are the hands and the voice of Christ, blessing the children with a gift that will positively impact them for their entire life.

So, what do you think? Is that happening today? I think it is. At least it's happening for the 20 or so children who come through our doors. Oh, and for the dozen or more additional kids who come through our doors every summer for Vacation Bible School. And it's certainly happening in the middle and senior high Sunday classes. But what about the other young people who live in our area? I recently read that there are approximately 6500 students in the Fountain/Fort Carson School district with the possibility of 3,000 more arriving soon. That is nearly 10,000 students in our geographical area. And as things now stand we are able to bless approximately 50 to 100 with our various ministries. That means that 99 to 99.5% of the young people in our area will have to be blessed by other churches or we just have to hope that they will connect with Jesus when they get older. Unfortunately, According to George Barna, the window of opportunity for people to come to Christ is widest when they are between the ages of 5 and 12. Of the 42% of the people who come to commit their lives to Christ at sometime in their lives, 32% do so between the ages of 5 and 12. (*Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, Barna Pg.34)

Now, obviously, we are not the only way that Children can be introduced to Jesus. Right here in Fountain there are many parts to the Body of Christ – other churches and other organizations who work with children. As we wrestle with the realities of our time and the enormity of the task before us, please don't hear this as some sort of indictment against our education department or shame on our church. Our volunteers are as committed and ready to serve as any I have seen in any church. It's just that there is so much to be done! One more time the *harvest is plentiful and the workers are few*.

One more thing we need to keep in mind is that in the story of Jesus blessing the children it was the parents who brought their children to him. Jesus was out in the community and the parents brought the children to him to be blessed. I'm guessing that for many of the parents of the children in our community they see no value in bringing their children to be blessed by the Body of Christ. They're not bad parents, they just don't realize that a Christian education is just as vital to the well-being of a child as a math, science, reading and writing education. Many people, maybe even most people don't value the education we know to be of the highest value. Unfortunately, that is just the reality of our time.

That makes it all the more important for us to find creative ways to be there for the kids in our community. We need to consider how important what we do in this church is to the future of children and youth we haven't even met yet. We need to think about how what we teach our children and the children of this community will impact our town and our world. We need to keep in mind that the children who come to know Jesus are just as much a part of the Body of Christ as adults are.

Marlene LeFever illustrates this for us in the following story:

*Forty years ago, a Philadelphia congregation watched as three nine-year-old boys were baptized and joined the church. Not long after, the church sold the building and disbanded.*

*One of those boys was Dr. Tony Campolo, Christian sociologist at Eastern University, Pennsylvania. Dr. Campolo remembers: "Years later when I was doing research in the archives of our denomination, I decided to look up the church report for the year of my baptism. There was my name and Dick White's — he is now a missionary — and Bert*

*Newman is a professor of theology at an African seminary.”*

*Then Campolo read the church report for the year he joined the church. It said, “It has not been a good year for our church. We have lost twenty-seven members. Three joined, and they were only children.”*

— Marlene LeFever,  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

“They were only Children.” But even though they were only children, they were the church. We are blessed to have children in our church. We are blessed to have adults who are committed to those children. We are blessed to be a part of a growing community where there are lots of Children. Please come join us next Saturday as we begin to explore how we can better support these young, but vital partners in the ministry of our congregation.

The first step in this process begins with a conversation. We are beginning the conversation this coming Saturday and I hope you will come be a part of it.

Let me wrap it up this way: I would hope we would never say that the older folks in our church are the history of our church. They are very definitely still the church today. In the same way, the young people are not the future of the church. They too **are** the church. Amen.