

**MORE THAN PUMPKINS:  
WE LET THE CHILDREN COME  
MATTHEW 19:14; 18:3-4  
OCTOBER 28, 2012**

The preacher's 5 year-old daughter noticed that  
her father always paused and bowed his head for a moment  
before starting his sermon.  
So one day, she asked him why.  
He was very proud that she was so observant of his messages.  
"Well, Honey, I'm asking the Lord to help me preach a good sermon."  
She asked "How come He doesn't answer your prayer?"  
Have you ever had a child say something that brought you up short?  
They have a tendency to say whatever is on their mind,  
with no screen for social niceties, no political correctness.  
And sometimes you just want them to stuff a sock in it.

Sometimes people don't see value in children.  
Oh, everyone says they do.  
But how many parents don't make the time to read to their children,  
to meet their children's teachers,  
help their children with homework,  
go to their children's sporting events or musical concerts?  
Child abuse and child neglect are at all-time highs.  
And how many children are never born at all?  
There are over one million abortions in the US each year.  
The Alan Guttmacher Institute,  
the research arm of Planned Parenthood,  
says the vast majority, 95% or more, of those abortions are because of lifestyle choices,  
not because of rape, incest, or medical health issues.  
They are abortions done because  
having a child would interfere with  
the kind of life the mother, and sometimes the father, wants to live.

Even around some churches, if you watch closely, you might see some hints of not valuing children.  
Kids don't make big donations.  
They don't serve in important roles of leadership or service.  
If they get sick, their parents may have to stay home with them.  
But they cost a lot,  
with all that curriculum and craft materials and such.  
And a children's minister!  
And a youth minister for the ones who aren't children any more,  
but aren't quite adults yet.

Years ago, when I was appointed to a different church, not NWH,  
the leaders of the congregation told me they wanted strong preaching,  
they wanted their church to grow,  
and they wanted more children and youth in their church.  
And I thought, "Hot dog! I've got a live bunch who really want to do ministry!"  
During my ministry in that congregation I learned what that really meant.  
We want strong preaching,

but don't say anything that might stretch or challenge us.  
 We want to grow,  
 but don't bring any strangers in here;  
 and the preacher's going to have to do all the inviting.  
 And we want children and youth,  
 but we're not going to spend any money on them,  
 we're not going to volunteer in that ministry,  
 and we'd prefer if you'd keep them out of the building,  
 because they are noisy and messy.

But listen to the attitude of Jesus in Matthew 19:

"Little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.  
 But the disciples rebuked those who brought them."  
 We've got more important things to do,  
 more important people to see,  
 more important places to go!  
 But "Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me,  
 and do not forbid them;  
 for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'  
 When he had laid hands on them, he went on from there." (Mt.19:13-15)  
 He laid hands on them to pray for them and bless them.  
 He carved out time for young people.

Now, some people romanticize Jesus' special attention for children.

They cite how, in another passage, he pointed out a child and said,  
 "Unless *you* change and become like little children,  
 you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Mt.18:3)  
 And, of course, Jesus must have been talking about the innocence of children.  
 The innocence of children.  
 A phrase only uttered by people who have never had children.  
 Or people whose children have been out of the house long enough  
 that they have forgotten.  
 Did you have to teach your child to not share?  
 "Now, Tommy, don't let Suzy play with your toys.  
 Snatch it away from her right now."  
 No, with little kids it's all about me.  
 I want, I like, I need, mine, mine, mine.  
 It is with adults, too,  
 but we've learned to cover it up so we look better.

Jesus was not suggesting there's something  
 wonderfully innocent and sinless about children.  
 He goes on in the next verse to say,  
 "Whoever humbles himself like this child  
 is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt.18:4)  
 Whoever humbles himself,  
 whoever recognizes his need and asks for help.

Jesus saw great value in young people not because they're pure, innocent and sinless,  
 but simply because they are human beings created in the image of God.

The same reason he sees value in you.

Not because of what you can do, how much you can give,  
 how moral or religious you are, or how good you look.

You are valuable just because you are created in God's image.  
 Jesus was not going to allow his followers to  
     shove young people aside for things they might consider more important.

Jesus saw great value in young people.

And so do we at NWH.

That's why we let the children come and let the youth come.

That's why we pour into them volunteers, facilities, paid staff, and financial resources.

No single ministry gives more man-hours to a group of people than Mother's Day Out.

No single event has more volunteers giving more time than Vacation Bible Camp.

No age group uses more space for Sunday school than children's classes.

**VIDEO: CHILDREN: Lisa Taylor, Lysi Collins, Dylan Brought, Silas Baxter, Cheyenne Weardon**

Our youth ministry has a great group of teachers and sponsors who give

    Sunday mornings for Sunday school,

    Sunday evenings for youth worship and Bible study,

    Wednesday nights for youth group,

    and personal vacation time to go with our youth on retreats and mission trips.

    And it's the youth ministry that sponsors the Pumpkin Patch,

        because it makes their retreats and mission trips more affordable for our young people.

**VIDEO: YOUTH: Rachel Boezinger, Joshua Duke, Katie Taylor**

We see value in young people,

    so we have full time paid staff to lead those ministries.

The truth is, not everyone is cut out for doing hands on ministry with children or youth.

    If that's you, don't feel guilty about it.

        God made different people different ways

            with different spiritual gifts and ministry passions,

            so we could together do all the different things that need to get done.

Personal confession:

    I'm not a children's ministry guy.

    Jill once persuaded me to take on a Vacation Bible Camp group with her.

        There were no fatalities or injuries,

            not even any children emotionally scarred.

        But... Let's just say she never asked me to do that again.

    When we first came to NWH, there was no youth minister.

        In fact, there were no youth sponsors.

        So I led the youth group.

            That was hard work for me.

            I had to try to think about things

                from the perspective of a youth,

                search for ideas for games and lessons,

                and push myself for energy.

            This was way outside of my training and experience.

            I'm not a natural at youth.

        And I thanked God when someone came along who

            had a real sense of calling and giftedness

            for ministry to and with youth.

    I love our kids and our youth.

        I really do.

            I'll chat with them in the foyer or the hallway.

            I'll poke my head in on youth group from time to time.

I'll high five them as they walk by.  
 But I'm not cut out to do those ministries on a regular basis.  
 I thank God for those of you who *are* called and equipped by God for that.  
 But I am still an integral part of making children's ministry and youth ministry happen  
 because I support the ministry financially.  
 And to the extent that you give financial support to NWH,  
 you, too, are part of the ministry to youth and children.  
 When you give, you are standing alongside Jesus when he says,  
 "Let the young people come."

Sometimes people question the value of ministry to children and youth.  
 After all, how much can they really understand?  
 Real, mature, Christian faith only develops in adults.  
 Right?  
 I'm not so sure.

A Sunday School teacher decided to have her young class  
 memorize one of the most quoted passages in the Bible - Psalm 23.  
 She gave the youngsters a month to learn the chapter.  
 Little Rick was excited about the task.  
 But he just couldn't remember all the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.  
 After lots of practice, he could barely get past the first line.  
 On the day that the kids were scheduled to recite Psalms 23 in front of the congregation,  
 Ricky was nervous and scared.  
 When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly,  
 "The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know."

Sometimes I think we overcomplicate the whole thing.

On July 22 I baptized a 6 year old boy here at NWH.  
 A couple of months before,  
 he had accepted Christ as his savior and Lord during Children's Church Time.  
 He immediately began to talk about getting baptized.  
 His parents talked with me, we made an appointment,  
 and I talked with him in my office.  
 And he really understood the whole thing  
 and had the right reasons for wanting to be baptized.  
 And he wanted it by immersion.

So on July 22, at the late service, he came up front.  
 I asked his parents the questions I always ask at a child's baptism.  
 They reaffirmed their faith in Christ  
 and committed themselves to do all they could  
 to raise their son to know Christ.  
 The congregation made the same commitment.  
 And then I asked that 6 year old boy,  
 "Do you know how much Jesus loves you?"  
 He boldly said, "More than anybody!"  
 "Do you know that he died on the cross to pay for your sins,  
 so you could be forgiven?"  
 "Yes, I know that."  
 "And do you know he rose from the dead  
 so you could be with him forever and ever?"  
 "Yes."

And so he was baptized into the family of God.  
 To the extent that you support the ministries of NWH with your financial giving,  
 you had a part in that.  
 Our children's ministry and our youth ministry is your ministry.  
 And the fruit it bears in young lives is yours to celebrate.

### **BRING PLEDGES TO THE ALTAR**

Now, a word just for those of us who consider NWH our home.

If you're a guest, you can sit back and relax.

But if this is your home, this part is just for you.

All this month we've been talking about what our giving pays for,  
 the various ministries, the lives that have been touched.  
 there are so many more stories that could be told about  
 lives enriched, lives changed, eternities changed.

You need to know that the pledges for 2012 were quite low.

A few folks had lost their jobs

and many people were a bit nervous about the economy and their own future employment.

Our pledges for 2012 were so low,

we could not sufficiently underwrite our ministry.

So, in order to not stop some ministries altogether or lay off staff,

we had to live, to a large extent, off of special giving from the past,  
 that was outside the general budget and offering.

We've been careful and it has gone well.

But the money from special giving is greatly reduced now.

The work of the NWH needs your financial support.

As we come to the moment for each of us to make our financial commitment for 2013,

please prayerfully consider who our God is and how much you can trust him with your finances.

I've never met anyone who got into financial trouble

because they trusted God too much or

they gave too much to his work.

### **PRAY**