

CHILDREN MATTER

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We hear it repeatedly: black lives matter, blue lives matter, all lives matter. That's all true, but today I want to speak up for those who have little voice in what is happening in the world around us. Today, I want to remind you that children matter—from the womb to the tomb.

Last Wednesday, October 31, was also Reformation Day—the day that the priest, Martin Luther, nailed his complaints against the church's non-Biblical traditions on the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany, calling the church's leaders to return to the Scriptures as their guide.

On one occasion, Luther came upon Anasthasia, his four-year-old, chattering away about Christ, angels, and heaven. Wistfully, he said, "My dear child, if only one could hold fast to this faith." Quickly she replied, "Why, Papa? Don't you believe it?" Luther was shocked and later wrote, "Christ has made the children our teachers."

Why minister to children? Why does the church spend so much money, time, and energy to serve the little people under our care?

Because children matter to God. And why do they matter?

A Gift From God

Because they are a *gift* from God. Not just to enhance our economy, as they often have in agricultural and industrial cultures, but to enhance our lives. And our knowledge of God.

Psalm 127:3 Children are a gift from the Lord;

they are a reward from Him.

⁴ Children born to a young man

are like arrows in a warrior's hands.

⁵ How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them!

He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.

The fact is that the only humans NOT born as children were Adam and Eve, who were hand-made by God. Even the Messiah came to us as a newborn child (!), a circumstance that defied religious logic and offended many learned Jews. Why not appear as an adult male of intelligence, prestige, and power?

Among the first responsibilities given to our first ancestors was to populate the earth.

Then it was to teach and train their descendants how to live—generation after generation.

Psalm 78:5 For He issued His laws to Jacob;

He gave His instructions to Israel.

He commanded our ancestors

to teach them to their children,

⁶so the next generation might know them—

even the children not yet born—

and they in turn will teach their own children.

⁷So each generation should set its hope anew on God,

not forgetting His glorious miracles

and obeying His commands.

⁸Then they will not be like their ancestors—

stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful,

refusing to give their hearts to God.

Psalm 145:1 I will exalt You, my God and King,

and praise Your name forever and ever.

²I will praise You every day;

yes, I will praise You forever.

³Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise!

No one can measure His greatness.

⁴Let each generation tell its children of Your mighty acts;

let them proclaim Your power.

⁵I will meditate on Your majestic, glorious splendor

and Your wonderful miracles.

⁶Your awe-inspiring deeds will be on every tongue;

I will proclaim Your greatness.

⁷Everyone will share the story of Your wonderful goodness;

they will sing with joy about Your righteousness.

These are just some of the ways we communicate the Good News to succeeding generations.

We have a promise in the Word of God, regarding how we model and teach our children. It is prefaced with a warning:

Proverbs 22:5 Corrupt people walk a thorny, treacherous road; whoever values life will avoid it.

⁶Direct your children onto the right path,

and when they are older, they will not leave it.

God has given every parent the responsibility to raise his or her children with the knowledge and discipline of the Lord. Why? Because children matter to God.

It was Jesus who was primarily responsible for highlighting this.

Loved by God

Children matter because Jesus wants them near. He loves them jubilantly. He said their faith is the stuff of Heaven.

Matthew 18:2 Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. ³ Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. ⁴ So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁵ "And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me, [and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me (Mark 9:37)]. ⁶ But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Mark 10:13 One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

¹⁴ When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." ¹⁶ Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.

Yes, children matter to God.

Future of the Church

Children matter because they are the church's future (and our future).

Malachi 4:5 "Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. ⁶ His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse."

God's prophetic plan includes a high value on the roles children play in the Kingdom of God.

Joseph and Mary presented their firstborn son, Jesus, to the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem, as prescribed by the law of Moses...

Luke 2:25 At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon

him ²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. ³⁰ I have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared for all people. ³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" ³³ Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

The Savior of the world arrived as an infant! And children do not arrive as blank pieces of paper; *divine destiny* is bound up in the heart of a child! They are conceived with a heavenly calling. They are born as signs from God, with good purposes embedded in their souls.

It is up to us to encourage their discovery and pursuit of that destiny.

The great evangelist D. L. Moody was once asked, "How many converts did you have last night." He answered, "Two and one-half."

"You mean two adults and a child?"

"No," he replied. "Two children and one adult."

Think about it: a child converted is an entire life converted!

Ministry to children is important.

Our Mandate

It's important because it's what the Lord asked of us.

In a series of prayer meetings many years ago, we were seeking God's direction for our church; where should we invest our energy and our funds for ministry? Should we look for a youth pastor? A worship leader? An executive assistant?

The answer came back clearly: Invest in the children. Instead of trying to recover their faith in their teen years or young adulthood, stir up their faith as little children and teach them to remain faithful through their teen years and young adulthood. Focus on the children.

Psychologist Paul D. Meier, of the Minirth-Meier Clinic, has said: *“It is my firm belief that approximately eighty-five percent of one’s adult personality is formed by the time he is six years old. Those first six years, therefore, are obviously the most crucial. I believe some children can understand enough during the latter part of their first six years to know that they are frequently sinful, that they want God to forgive them, and that they want to live forever in heaven—and then put their simple faith in Christ.*

I have known parents who said that they did not want to *prejudice* their children, so they would not say anything to them about religion. They wanted to let them choose for themselves. The devil, however, was quite willing to prejudice their children, so very early in life they learned to lie and swear, although their parents had a foolish objection to teaching them to pray to Jesus.

If you ever feel it is your duty not to “prejudice” a piece of ground by sowing good seed in it, you may rest assured that the weeds will not imitate your impartiality, but they’ll take possession of that land in a shocking and thorough manner.

Why minister to children?

Children are imaginative. Capture their imaginations with stories from the Bible of God’s power and grace, before they are captured with the concoctions of human fantasy and theory.

Children are teachable. Begin early to teach them, for they will begin early to sin. Teach them to repent of their sins, to stand in their faith, and to love as Jesus loved.

Children are impressionable. Their hearts are hungry for love and their minds are hungry for truth. The world and the devil will leave their impressions on them, if we fail to leave our own.

That is why, in one month, on Sunday, December 2nd, we will formally launch our renewed ministry to children, under the banner of Handmade Children’s Ministries. Pastor Veronica Heinlein and her team of ministry associates are already training together with a new curriculum, called TruFire. And we are energetically renovating and decorating their learning spaces. On that Sunday, we’re going to lead you on a tour of their learning spaces, and give you a taste of the ministry they experience each week. Plus, we’ll feed you lunch!

The changes we’re making are not artificial; they are essential. Our efforts are not just superficial, they are fundamental. This is how we fight our battles—against falsehoods, against drugs, against gangs, against immorality. This is how we build godly adults and godly families.

If you are a parent or grandparent of young children, become a supportive part of our team. Help us help you raise godly children!

If you are neither a parent nor a grandparent of young children in Marin, you can still encourage the children of the church, and support the work we are doing.

Hilary Clinton gave us the slogan, "It takes a village." In many parts of the world that is fitting, but Marinites are not village people. What we can say here is this: "It takes the church—the local church—working together to raise up godly young adults."

A minister asked a group of children in his Sunday School class, "Why do you love God?" He got a variety of answers, but the one he liked best was from a boy who said, "I guess it just runs in our family."

Let it run in our family! Are you with me, church?

Be certain of this: Children matter to God. And if they matter to you, too, God will be your ally.

Will you commit to pray for the next generation?

Will you commit to encourage children to follow Jesus, wherever you find them?

Will you commit to let others know that children matter to God, and they matter to us at Trinity?

Will you pray about how you can best support the ministries to children here at Trinity?

It's more than important; it's necessary, for the Kingdom's sake.