

“God’s Children”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, welcome back to KUMC for our combined outdoor service. In a year of uncertainty it has been a joy to worship with you in a manner that is close to what we are accustomed to. Earlier this summer we had our first outdoor Confirmation service where we saw Reagan become a member of our church, and today we have another milestone in that we got to see little Claire Baptized outside. Jason and Katie, while this may not be typical format for Baptizing your baby, it at least will make a lifelong memory. Claire’s formal entrance into God’s church is most certainly one we will remember for a long, long time.

Today we are going to take a break from our usual message out of Ezekiel. For the last month we have been working our way through that book, and to be frank it is a difficult piece of scripture to read on your own. There is a lot of imagery, a lot of prophecy, and very few of us have heard much about it. This morning as we celebrate Claire’s Baptism we are instead looking at some scripture that is much more familiar to all of us. In Matthew 18 and 19, Jesus shares how the Kingdom of God is open to the children. Jesus shows that the Lord cares very much for our little ones.

Our first reading comes about midway through Jesus’s ministry. At this point He has already done many great things, and His disciples are starting to believe that this man they are following might be the Messiah. Unfortunately the disciples, like many of us, focused in on the wrong thing in our story. “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’” What a question to ask Jesus! Jesus could have answered in a multitude of ways, all of which would have made more sense than His real answer. The disciples probably expected to hear that a certain angel was greatest, or that one of them was going to be the greatest, or that of course the Lord was the greatest. The answer, though, is shocking. “And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me.’” What does Jesus mean by this? He is stating that humility is key, that we need to understand that everything we have comes from the Lord.

We can see this humility that Jesus is talking about by looking at the little one in our midst today. Jason and Katie, what is it that Claire can do on her own? Can she cook or clean or work a job? Of course not, she is totally dependent upon you two and her grandparents and her big sister and many others to take care of her. Beloved, we have to remember that we are

truthfully a lot more like Claire in our faith than we often think. Sure we have responsibilities and we have work we should do for the kingdom, but ultimately everything depends upon He who created us. Not a single one of us can bring another to Christ without His handiwork. Not a single one of us can build the church up, or preach a great message, or heal another's heart without the Lord doing all the heavy lifting. That humility that a little child has, where they know they are fully dependent upon mom and dad, should carry over into our faith. Again we are of course called to do much for the kingdom, but we should never forget that it isn't we who do it but Him above. Before we move on from this first set of scripture, we should also look at the final verse from it.

Matthew 18:6 reads "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." Beloved, there is a stark warning here for us in regards to our faith and approaching the Lord in humility. Jason and Katie, I am sure I don't have to tell you, but you two are the most important people in the life of your daughters. If you don't take care of them, then who will? Mom and Dad, if you take your faith seriously then so will she. If you don't, then it is more likely that she will not. Family, you folks are next in line. What Grandma and Grandpa do matters. What Aunty does matters. What her cousins do matters. If you folks surround and support Claire and support her sister and her parents, it will make a huge impact. You are called to keep her from stumbling, to help raise her right in life, in the community, and in the church. Speaking of the church, Beloved you too have a part in helping this child. If the church is a toxic place where she doesn't feel welcome, that will carry over to how she understands Christ. If she knows that she is loved here, if folks remember her name and celebrate her achievements, and push her to know Jesus better... it will go a long ways towards Claire knowing Christ all the days of her life. Beyond the call we have to raise this little one well, all of us should remember that we to exemplify Christ crucified everywhere we go. If we do not, then we may be a stumbling block for another.

Our second reading out of Matthew works in conjunction with our first. It is the famous piece about how Jesus calls the little children to Himself. "Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'" Beloved, I don't think I have to tell you but our children are ancillary to the church. Someday all of us will pass, but the littlest ones here will still be around. It is our youth who will see the church into the next generation, and the one after that, and the one after that. This also applies to our youngest members and the newest believers. You who are new to the faith, or those of you who are new to our churches, you are vital and important. Not because you give more money or help move tables or make the church look good either. You are important because it is through you that Christ's saving grace expands to others. All of us have a calling to see others come into contact with Jesus so that they may be saved from

their sins and spend eternity in heaven. Each of you who call upon Christ have this calling and have this gift, and it is through your work that others will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our final piece of scripture we read this morning is one that we have talked about ad-nauseum here in our churches. It is the Great Commission, and it is Jesus's command that we go and share our faith. "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" This is where the rubber meets the road folks. We are commanded by Jesus, the Lord Himself, to go and spread this life saving message. The truth that we are sinners, that Jesus came and lived a perfect life that we could not, that He died in our place upon the cross, that He rose again on the third day, and that He still reigns in heaven seated at the right hand of the Father. These truths, the ones that we affirmed earlier in the Apostle's Creed, are the essence of the message we spread in the world. We share our faith so that others might come to that saving knowledge. We don't share for selfish reasons, we don't do anything to jeopardize the faith of anyone, and we do all that we can to bring others to Christ. If you call yourself a Christian, than that is your ultimate purpose. Your ultimate purpose is to see little ones like Claire come to know their Savior. Your ultimate purpose is to help your friends and family members and community members come to know the joy that you hold in your heart, the hope that you have. To that end we do what Christ has commanded. We go and we Baptize, proclaiming entrance into God's kingdom, just as we did for little Claire today. We go and share these truths, teaching them all that Jesus taught us in scripture. We make disciples, not causing anyone to stumble by our selfish ways but rather pushing everyone we meet closer to Jesus, so that they may enjoy the same eternity that you and I have. Beloved, as we celebrate the Baptism of one of God's little children today, we should do well in remembering that as God's children ourselves we are called to do these things.

Take you calling seriously, pray for each other, preach the good news, and walk in the ways of the Lord so that none should stumble. This week, and every week, fulfill your calling and proclaim the truth of Christ crucified. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer