

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

August 21, 2016; the 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17.

Children and Spirituality

God says to Jeremiah, before you were born, I knew you,
consecrated you, appointed you...a prophet to the
nations.

Jeremiah protests, --but Lord God, I do not know how to
speak for I am only a boy.

There is God's call.

There is protest from the one being called.

And God responds,

“Do not say, I am only a boy...for you shall go where I
send

you and you shall speak what I tell you
to speak, enable you to speak.”

The dynamics of call -- God calls, often we feel that we
are not capable to answer the call, then God makes
a way, God equips.

God equips the called, more than God calls the equipped.¹
And God calls everyone to be about the work of making
God's reign visible here and now.

God's reign is visible when the poor are feed; the
homeless given shelter; the prisoners visited; when
all that divides us is overcome with love.

Discernment is required to know what God's call is.
Is God calling you to a new job, a new relationship, a new
focus to increase justice and peace and healing in
the world...or is God's call about on-going
faithful service in a circumstance that has
long be yours.

What gives you energy?

Grabs your imagination?

What fills your heart and gives you vision for what can
be?

This could be a call from God.

And calls change during our lives...we change, our
circumstances change...

God's love for us does not change...God's faith in us does
not change...but what we are being called to
can change.

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol., 3*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, Epub., Thomas R. Steagald, "Theological Perspective," Loc 13256 of 14296.

Today, hearing Jeremiah's call story, I am struck that Jeremiah was young, a boy...and his youth shaped his ministry even as it was God who equipped him and made it possible.

Today we are celebrating the conclusion of our summer children's chapel program, which has focused on seeing God..asking the children and us, where do we see God.

Children help us to see God...sometimes saying the most amazing things...insightful...so right...so natural about God, about the life of the spirit...unfiltered, the younger they are, and there is something just so great about that...that natural way with God and the things of the Spirit that a child has.

Many parents have come to me with their child or we have just been standing around coffee hour, and the parents have the child ask me the question about God or Church or faith they are being asked.

Children bring adults to church.

Is God a boy or a girl, do animals go to heaven, why do people get baptized, what is prayer?

They ask or sometimes they tell me how it is and they are right.

Kids get directly to heart of the matter.

Kids keep us honest, and also remind us or teach us that what we do and how we do it matters...they are learning, they are observing, listening...all the time, and certainly in church.

Children teach us how to be better.

Being a parent, a grandparent, a close relative or family friend, a foster parent.

They are watching.

One of my clergy colleagues tells this story...it really happened a few years ago.

In a church, where all the clergy were women...one day a young boy who had been going to that church all his young life, is in the pew with his mom, he leans over and asks her, "Mommy, can boys be priests too?"

It matters...what we say...what we do...what it looks like up here and out there (in the pews).

Kids give us so much...so much grace...God working through them.

We will hear a song today offered by the children about God, where they, where we see God.

Such a gift to us.

Jesus told his disciples, his friends, and us, that we must become like children to get him...what he was aboutwhat he was saying...who God is.

Consider today's Gospel reading.

What Jesus does is so simple, a child can understand it. A woman is crippled, and Jesus heals her. Jesus gets into trouble with the local religious authorities because he is breaking the religious rules...as explained by the leader of the synagogue, hey, Jesus, there were six days this week that you could have healed this woman but not on this day...it is the sabbath day.

This is not allowed.

This is not right....Jesus is told.

But Jesus reminds those who criticized him that they are allowed to give their animals water on the sabbath...and is not this woman this human being worthy of care...of compassion...this is so simple that a child can understand it... but one who is bound by the rules is not open to God's on-going revelation...this can happen in every

organization...it happens in the Episcopal Church too.

The sabbath, the day of rest, God's gift to the people...is all about freedom...they may have to work six days, but everyone regardless of status or power or money, gets one day off...one day to pray...one day to focus on God and remember who we are before God.

Freedom.

Jesus freed that woman...healed her.

She had been bent over for 18 years...and Jesus said, not one day longer...she had been unable to see well, she could not look up...she could not interact well or walk well...but Jesus changed all that...giving her freedom...through her showing what the sabbath could be...liberation...freedom.

It is so simple that a child can understand what Jesus did.

What keeps you or me bent over?

What limits your freedom?

What healing to we seek?

Can we connect with the wonder and faith of our inner

child...the child of God we were born into the world
being...before anyone or anything started to limit
our freedom, or vision, our sense of
well-being in God's creation?

When I was last on a retreat, I was praying about these
sorts of things, and in prayer God helped me to
know that within me is a light, a spark from
God, that glows warm and clear, that
nothing can tarnish.

God has created all of us...birthed us into the world with
God's spark in us that will never go out or be
overcome.

My spiritual director directed me to writing by Thomas
Merton, which speaks to this core being of us all,
that we had as babies and children...and
perhaps felt more then before life happened
to us?

*At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which
is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure
truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to
God,
which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes
our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our*

*own mind or the brutalities of our own will.
This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is
the pure glory of God in us...
It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of
heaven.
It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see
these billions of points of light coming together in the
face and blaze of a sun that would make all the
darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely...I
have no program for this seeing.
It is only given.
But the gate of heaven is everywhere.²*

Amen.

2

<http://www.spiritualtravels.info/articles-2/north-america/kentucky-a-thomas-merton-tour/thomas-mertons-biography/quotations-from-thomas-merton/>