

Sermon Text for August 6, 2017

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Isaiah 11:1-9, Romans 8:12-17

“Kid’s play”

We had fun last night. I was looking out at the people and the venue and those who had put in so much hard work to make it happen, Mark Feiler and the Reinmillers and thought about those behind the scenes who were involved in making it happen, the worship and outreach and fellowship committees, and then looked back at VBS and thought of the army of people that it took to get that done and I thought, I can’t believe that they pay me to play. It is so much fun to play here at First Presbyterian. At the heart of our play is a freedom that we know who is in control and who is in charge and so we can live a life of celebration.

I had a dream last week. It was a strange week for me. I had 20 hours of sleep from Monday evening to Tuesday evening, your pastor was feeling quite sick, and he was exhausted, but who knew? Certainly not your pastor. During that sleep marathon I had a dream. I have shared it with some of you, but I want to share it with all of you because I believe dreams are important and the more you share them, the more people are able to draw meaning from them. The dream was a metaphor where I saw this church as a boat. And as any church the boat has holes that people, you, are working hard to fill. There are holes above and below the water line. If there is a hole below the water line and it is not filled, and no one steps in to fill it, then the boat is going to take on water in a hurry and someone has to step in to fill that hole. So, Christian Education is a must, and that hole has to be kept filled by you. Worship is central to the life of the church, it is from which all things flow. Nothing is more important in this church than worship. If there is a hole in worship, it is below the water line and it can’t wait to be filled.

But we also have holes above the water line. And there will always be holes above the water line that are never filled. It is easy for any one of us to look at this church and say, we have a problem there. Because you are right, we have a problem there. We will always have problems but those above the water line, maybe you just don’t have the people, or I just don’t have the bandwidth, or even at times even the desire to fill them. But the boat, the church as a whole, isn’t going to be affected significantly if you keep a hole unplugged above the water line. I thought that dream had meaning as we go through the waters together and each of us may have a different perspective on what is

above and what is below the water line, but one thing this church has figured out, it is that it takes a church to plug the holes, not any one person.

You know, there are a lot of things that we do at this church that aren't necessary to keep this boat afloat. We didn't have to have the Bluegrass Fest. We don't have to offer a young couple Sunday School class. We don't have to have a Food Bank. We don't have to have Presbyterian Women. There are so many things that we do here at the church that are above the water line and if they went away we would have to ask who would be affected. Each of the things that I mentioned I can tell you people who would be affected significantly. Yes, each one. But I hope and I pray that each of us as we take part in these activities see it as a calling from Almighty God and so as a result we are able to be involved in it as child's play. As something that we enjoy and take joy in.

Last week we saw how important it was to get the Holy Spirit, even while we understand that none of us owns the Holy Spirit. This week we are going to see that Paul states that a transformation takes place when we do get the Holy Spirit and that transformation changes us into little children, a spiritual rendition of freaky Friday or Big with Tom Hanks. As children of God we will see today how important it is for us to see as our Father he who sent Jesus Christ to die for us so that our lives can be lived as kids play, as children of the living God.

READ SCRIPTURE

When you read through these verses and match them together with the verses in Isaiah you will see that there is something upside down about what happens. In Romans Paul states in verse 14 for all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. Who needs Ponce de Leon's fountain of youth, for Christians, for those who cry out Abba Father our age inhibitor mechanism is the Holy Spirit that brings us life. Remember, we talked about that life last week. This new relationship with the Father brings us joy and makes us children. You would think that when one came to know God that they would put aside childish things but here Paul says no, we actually become children.

In Isaiah we see the same type of kids play that takes place when God's kingdom is to rule. Turn back to Isaiah 11 and you will see the first 5 verses deal with a fairly severe God who will bring justice. Once that justice is brought about guess who is put in charge? Not a military, not a wizened judge, not a President. But read this, a little child shall lead them. It is the one who is the least threatening, the most naïve, and also the most trusting who will be put in charge of all of God's creation. The last verses of this

reading in Isaiah talk about the child playing over the asp and with the snakes. Kids play, that's what God has in mind for his kingdom, a place where children will be in charge and there is no harm to all things. Crazy isn't it? Wonderful, isn't it?

How do we interpret this? That chaos is to rule the day? It is interesting how it seems as if the political fashion of the day is to say we should eliminate those institutions which we have had for so long and which many say do not work. I don't believe the problem is organized institutions. If you get rid of the organized institutions you end up with Libya and Syria. I believe we have to ask the question: for what are those institutions organized to do? Think of the church. For what are we organized to do? Are our structures set up strictly to keep those of us in satisfied and comfortable, or are we organized and organizing our institution to reach out to those who don't know Jesus? How much are we organizing and how much of our energies is to maintain what we have as opposed to discovering what the needs of others around us might be?

These Scriptures ought to remind us that our lives need to be a reflection of us playing in God's kingdom as children of the Father. There is a complete transformation of all of creation when we receive and accept God as father. Our status changes from those facing death to those living life, real life, from rebellion to obedience because we want to obey and not out of fear of punishment, look at verse 15 and remind ourselves of that. Oh I could go on forever but you know as well as I do that kids are fearless if they trust and know you. The same is true when we receive Christ out of love, fear disappears. Finally, our status changes from enemy of God to beloved children.

There are so many examples in Scripture of this transformation that takes place when we fall into our father's arms. Think of the prodigal son who could see his father's outstretched arms from far away and come running back. Paul in these verses is reminding us of the joy there is in being children of God. He is reminding us of the joy there is in being part of a new family where love and tolerance and understanding is present. This family of Christian siblings of which we are a part, Paul tells us in Galatians that Christ is a brother in that family. I guess the big brother who did all things right.

I remember as the youngest of 4 boys and the other 3 boys being absolute angels how I got away with everything. I could do no wrong in the eyes of my teachers because my brothers did no wrong. There were so many times that I would get into mischief at school and the teachers would say at the principals office, now I know Bobby had

nothing to do with it because his brothers were so good. That's what it's like having Christ as our brother, we are not judged in the family by our father, because our big brother was already judged. Think of that for a moment and let out a sigh of relief. Do you see the new family of which we are a part where we can, as we saw last week, truly share all things in common.

If Christ is our brother then what is our Father like? Paul in verse 15 states that just by the fact that we call God Father we are implying, or admitting even better, claiming God as our Father. He uses this term Abba which you have probably heard is a term used in Scripture meaning daddy like something a child would call his father. I wish that were true because it would really fit well into this theme of kid's play, but it is not. It is just another language that is used, Aramaic and Aramaic was the language that Jesus and his disciples spoke. Three times this is used in the New Testament, and each time it is followed by the Greek word meaning Father, Pateras. Jesus himself uses this word Abba in the garden when he is at his most agonizing time. The author of the Gospel uses it to express a state of need or anxiety. But the mere fact that when we pray we are commanded to pray by saying Our father... means that we are children of the living God and that is good news.

Now Paul ends these verses not on a negative note, but he certainly does give us a reality check. He says, since you are now children of the living God who has commanded you to live in joy and abundant life, you will be so closely associated to the father that those who hate him, will hate you, those who revile him will revile you. It is no wonder that Freud who called God an illusion also called Christians pigs sweating in a prayer closet. We need to expect persecution.

When I was in middle school my dad spent two weeks with the FMLN, a guerilla group in El Salvador investigating their use of God in their cause for justice and liberation. When he got back, he warned us that the kids at school might make fun of us because of him. It never happened, but I was ready and I was a bit disappointed because I wanted anyone to just try to say anything bad about my dad. That should be our sense, our feeling as children of God to be prepared for what the world throws at us, not that God needs us to defend him.

Are we living lives that are a reflection of our new status as children of God? Do we know how to play, how not to be worried about tomorrow. That's why Jesus said let the children come unto me for such is the kingdom of heaven, because their mind was set

on Christ and knowing about Christ. That is why Jesus says in Matthew 6:32 that God knows what we need even before we think we need it. Kids don't worry about their food, they don't worry about their shelter, they just play in life.

Let us become children and learn how to play and live our lives as children of the living God. Amen.