



GRACE COMMUNITY
Welcome. Love. Serve.

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost
July 15, 2018

Sisters & Brothers,

When we moved back into the sanctuary we took the opportunity to begin The Middle Hour where all could gather -- children, youth, and adults -- and learn about what it means to follow Jesus. This middle hour also gave us the opportunity to move towards intergenerational worship.

Since then we have heard the question, why? Well, because Christian Worship from its very beginning has been intergenerational, like our Jewish brothers and sisters, early Christian communities knew that worship is for the whole people of God. Christian worship is one of the foundational ways that we pass on the faith. Our founder John Wesley called worship one of the “means of grace.” This means that worship is one of the ways that we grow in love of God, self, and neighbor.

As Warren S. Brown & Brad D. Strawn tell us in *The Physical Nature of the Christian Life*:

“Persons become more and more Christian as they are nested within an accepting and loving group of persons who imitate one another, as each and all attempt to imitate Christ, and who tell and live into a biblical narrative of life.”

Worship is our “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God” and as such it is best passed on by modeling. The way of Jesus is passed on by allowing our children and youth to imitate -- to watch us praise, pray, hear, respond, and give thanks. The children also learn to imitate our discipline of gathering to praise God even when we don’t “feel it,” when it is rote, and when we don’t “have the time,” when boredom sets in, and when fear overwhelms. Children and Youth also learn from us as we gather that the worship of God is not an intellectual exercise but rather an exercise of the whole body so we too as adults at times do not understand, we too are distracted, we too find ourselves out of sorts.

Children and youth in worship also shape us. Their joy and dancing as the music plays, their loud voices and lack of inhibition, their imaginations and their difficulty staying still are a constant reminder that Jesus told us that we were to be like children if we wanted to

be part of the kingdom. What if we were as uninhibited, imaginative, and loud? What would worship of almighty God be like if we were willing to be as messy?

It is humbling to see ourselves in them, though it might seem like children and youth are not paying attention or are engaged, over time our pattern of praise and thanksgiving becomes part of who they are! If we are committed to discipling the next generation we must be willing to struggle through intergenerational worship.

Then the question becomes: What about the adults? Don't we need a break and the ability to worship without interruption? Well . . . no.

This was exactly the situation that Jesus encountered with the disciples. They kept the children from Jesus because they would be a distraction, a problem, a challenge to what grown ups needed done.

“People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’”

Luke 18:15-17, NRSV (see also Matthew 19:13-15 & Mark 10:13-16)

Jesus reminded them to “let the children come!”

Worship in the Christian faith is family dinner not a movie date. The adults are not the audience that receive and consume the message instead we are the body of Christ who gather to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. God is the audience and our worship posture must be modeled if we want our children and youth to worship God in Spirit and in truth.

So, what happens if a child or youth gets out of hand or a parent is at their wits end?

It is at those times that we remember that when we baptize a child we promise to support the parents in helping the kids grow in the way that “leads to life.” So all of us, parents and non-parents provide the space, the love, for kids to be kids, for parents to take a break, and for the church to be the church.

I am thankful for the congregations that have shaped my children in faith. I am thankful for the worshipping communities, including this one, that have adopted my children when we were at our wits end or leading worship. I am thankful that we are parenting in community for that is part of what it means to be the body of Christ.

But what about the parents and guardians, should they not have time by themselves?

Yes!! This is why we developed the middle hour which has offerings for all age groups. Though worship is pivotal to sustaining our life with God it is in smaller groups of adults that we grow in love of God, self, and neighbor. This is a full hour where children, youth, and adults have age level specific instruction and formation in the way of Jesus.

Though we have tried to give you a theological, biblical, and developmental defense of children and youth presence in worship we recognize that often it is not a rational issue but an emotional one. We invite you to ask yourself: What is worship about for me? How does my understanding reflect the Christian tradition, the scriptural witness, and our Wesleyan roots? What other questions do I have that maybe Pastor Juan or Pastor Jessica can help me explore as part of the middle hour?

We believe that our body is not complete without children and youth. We believe that we are a more faithful worshipping community when we offer our praise and thanksgiving across the generations. We know that it is not easy but it is truly worth it!

Peace & Love,



Juan Carlos+
Lead Pastor



Allison
Director of Children's Ministry



Melissa
Director of Youth Ministries

P.S. Recognizing that it is difficult to care for younger children during worship we will continue providing the Nursery as a option for parents with children ages 5 and below. We also honor and are thankful for those parents with children under 5 who still choose to worship with them and we are committed to providing a hospitable worshipping experience for you.

We invite you to read more on this important subject:

[Should Children Be Sitting through Worship in Big Church?](#) by Jaqueline in Deep Roots at Home

[Playing & Praying with Children in Worship](#) by Melissa Florer-Bixer

[Adults in the Church are to Blame for Teen Apathy](#) by Megan Briggs

[Intergenerational Ministry Isn't Just About the Kids](#) by The Rev. Melissa Cooper

[Children in Worship--Let's Bring it Back!](#) By Kevin DeYoung

[Including Kids in Worship](#) by Ian Heston Doescher