

## “Family Valued”

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UCC at The Villages, FL

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1 Kings 17:17-24

Mark 5:21-43

*While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said,*

*“Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?”*

*But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue,*

*“Do not fear, only believe.”*

*Mark 5:35-36*

Let us pray... O God,

Help us not to fear,

but believe that your Kingdom is yet possible ‘on Earth as it is in Heaven’.

Let our top priority as individuals, as a nation, and as a world,

be to restore to our children – the next generation, places of safety

in people's hearts and in neighborhood's streets.

Amen

Two weeks ago, I was at a demonstration held in Lake Sumter town square,  
that raised an alarm about our government's policy of “Zero Tolerance”  
that separates children from their families.

I was among 10 speakers who had the opportunity to speak to about 1,000 people  
gathered there – most of whom were from The Villages.

I told them that the care for children has become the tipping point for us as a society,  
balanced between whom we have been historically  
and whom we hope to become in the future.

This injustice is challenging us to recognize that we should

“Do good unto others...” or else, and that our goal must be to become

a Beloved Community as an achievable social reality,

which is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called,

God's ‘Kingdom... on Earth as it is in Heaven’.

I concluded by saying this:

*And we will know we are there*

*when we can leave the front door of our homes unlocked.*

*We will know we are there*

*when children come home as the streetlights come on –*

*not because they are afraid, but because it's too dark to play*

*and supper's on the table.*

*We will know we are home in that Beloved Community that is possible*

*when we see all children as our children.*

I know that sounds naïve, considering that every time we check the news

we learn about some new outrage or barbarism.

But wasn't this true about American neighborhoods at one time – for many of you?

When you were growing up, did your folks leave the front door unlocked,

and did you play outside until it got dark?

Willard, p.2

Wasn't it true at one time, that all the kids in the neighborhood  
were everyone's concern in a general sense –  
and there was a kind of social contract in place,  
where a village really did take up the responsibility to raise a child?  
Maybe this wasn't the case everywhere,  
but it was true for many neighborhoods in America at one time not so long ago.  
Was it true for you?  
And if so, shouldn't we want that for the next generation, too?

Well these days, we live in a world where –  
if that kind of dynamic still exists, it is rare.  
For most of the world – torn by age-old ethnic hatreds and war,  
it really does seem too late to be naïve... but even so, it is not too late...  
to be innocent. It is never too late to *choose* innocence.  
That goes for everyone and anyone,  
though some will choose to stay hardened no matter what.

Wouldn't we like to think that a church is equivalent to the Kingdom of Heaven,  
the Beloved Community that is possible?  
But that is not a fair expectation – perfection is not a fair expectation,  
but a congregation that is continually seeking to *perfect* itself,  
is a good goal.  
Beloved Community is an achievable goal when it does not presume  
to be a static utopia, but is dynamic as a diverse group striving for harmony.

Sunday to Sunday, we lift up the possibility of what that can mean in our world  
as a community where people trust and rely upon each other –  
where we 'guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love' as the song goes.  
Make no mistaken about it –  
Churches are still places where you can find true community.

In the wider world, trust is especially lacking these days –  
especially between generations.  
Styles of music and clothing have been ways of saying,  
“This is who we are”, as a way of distinguishing youth from their elders.  
I have wondered about the popularity of tattoos among young people these days  
as being an even stronger message to the older generation:  
“Keep away! Leave us alone!”  
What comes to mind is the real threat to youth of unwanted sexual advances,  
kidnapping, and trafficking, but there are other ways that  
older generations of a society prey upon their young,  
subconsciously as well as deliberately.

Willard, p.3

To some extent, there has been a subliminal backlash to the youth movement of the 1960's.

The availability of drugs and alcohol, materialist fads around designer clothes, sexual and violent themed movies, music, and video games have all been ways to sedate young people and divert them to pursue money, things, celebrity, and pleasure – rather than a purposeful life.

Advances of technology through smart phones, computers, and the internet have provided new ways to keep youth isolated – “divided and conquered.”

But there are passive ways, too, like inequities for a good education and limited opportunities for career employment.

So, there are real reasons why young people don't trust the older 'establishment', but have still allowed themselves to be sedated and diverted.

There has been a kind of conditioning to conformity acting on the 'over 30' crowd as well.

Fear of some threat personified as a boogeyman has taken many forms, driving people to build higher walls, put more locks on the doors, and install fool-proof alarm systems.

In such an environment, anybody who is different comes under suspicion.

The environment – cultural as well as natural, has become poisoned by toxic distrust...

Both of our scripture lessons today are stories about healing young people and their families, too,

in ways that are unconventional and “out there” –

even scandalously so, to a degree, but as a lesson for us in our time about trust.

In the story from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, the Prophet Elijah brings a boy back to life, 'stretching himself out' upon the lifeless body of a child.

This method is not recommended for medical professionals or faith-healing clergy to imitate these days!

Lawsuits would be pending – no matter how well-intentioned, and the potential success for such a procedure is dubious at best.

Although not as shocking as Elijah's method for healing.

the woman with the menstrual condition was freed from her distress

in a manner that was likewise unorthodox – and scandalous on her part.

These days, touching the clothes of an expert physician would be just silly as well as unlikely to do anything beyond a placebo effect.

However back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE, it was taboo for a woman to touch someone else during her period and make them ritually unclean

and, therefore, unable to participate in public worship.

Besides that, for a woman to publicly touch a man would also have been considered inappropriate in such a traditional culture.

Willard, p.4

To touch a dead body was another violation of Jewish ritual law,  
making a person technically 'unclean' – and therefore, not permitted  
to participate in public worship.

Both Jesus and Elijah did this, even though their actions raised  
a girl and boy respectively, back to life.

Yet, both Jesus and Elijah seem not to care about any of these  
violations of social propriety.

The outcomes of what they did actually produced healthy results  
for the individuals involved.

In the story from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, we presume, the Prophet Elijah acts compassionately  
in response to the mother's desperation and grief,  
to bring her only son back to life.

In the Gospel story, Jesus heals a woman from 12 years of discomfort and shame,  
then restores a 12 year-old girl back to life – and I believe this implies that  
they are mother & daughter.

So, Jesus restored a family as well, in the process.

The wife would have been estranged from her husband  
because her condition prevented her from fully participating with him.

His role as a worship leader would have been compromised daily  
as a violation of the purity laws in the course of their life together.

So, when the news first came that the little girl had died,  
and Jesus said, "Don't be afraid. Just trust me",  
the woman he had just healed was the mother  
and she was standing there, too.

Both desperate parents would be comforted by his words.  
and overjoyed when Jesus restored their little girl to life.

We don't know if they lived 'happily ever after' as a family,  
but from that point on, their 'faith' – their trust,  
would have given their relationship a chance for healing, too.

Jesus and Elijah are examples of remarkable people in life  
who can transcend the laws of conformity and polite society –  
not to get away with something,  
to bring healing and transformation and still be worthy of our trust.

There have been such extraordinary people throughout history –  
and hopefully, you have encountered them in your life, too.

In our Church's history, such people have been called saints,  
and periodically they show up in our present.

Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, and the Dalai Lama are certainly examples.  
Another person like this was a Presbyterian minister named, Fred Rogers –  
"Mister Rogers"...

Willard, p.5

Currently, a documentary is being shown in theaters portraying

Mister Rogers' career as a pioneer in children's television.

His program did not simply seek to be entertainment for children,

but Mr. Rogers helped talk to kids about difficult topics of the day  
like assassination, divorce, and racism.

He warned us then about how children were being 'bombarded' by the media,

long before there was the internet and games like, 'Grand Theft Auto'.

In the film, he tells about a time where he realized he was on the right path

and that he knew he had passed the 'test'.

This was when a child told him about the time his 'dog's leg came off',

and Fred Rogers correctly understood what the child was saying and answered,  
yes, that happens sometimes to toy dogs, but not to people.

One time he received a gift of calligraphy that was a quote from The Little Prince,  
a book by Antoine St. Exupery, which read:

*L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux. (What is essential is invisible to the eye.)*

In recalling the gift's message and its significance, Mister Rogers said,

*I feel the closer we get to knowing and living the truth of that sentence,  
the closer we get to wisdom.*

*What is essential about you that is invisible to the eye?*

*And who are those who have helped you become who you are today?*

Mister Rogers was all about love, yet someone like him these days

might be suspected of being up to something – like child abuse.

We have come to look at life as black and white, fight or flight without nuance,

but Mister Rogers was also suspect in his day, and those who doubted him,  
looked for some reason to discredit him – and couldn't find anything...

In closing, here is the July 9<sup>th</sup> reading from the Jesus Calling devotional

by Sarah Young, who writes as if Jesus was speaking... like Mister Rogers:

*Stop worrying long enough to hear my voice.*

*I speak softly to you, in the depths of your heart.*

*Your mind shuttles back and forth, hither and yon,*

*weaving webs of anxious confusion.*

*As thoughts rise up within you,*

*they become entangled in those sticky webs of worry.*

*Thus, My voice is muffled, and you hear only white noise.*

*Ask My Spirit to quiet your mind so that you can think My thoughts.*

*This ability is an awesome benefit of being My child,*

*patterned after My own image.*

*Do not be deafened by the noise of the world or from your own thinking.*

*Instead, 'be transformed by the renewing of your mind'*

*Sit quietly in My Presence, letting My thoughts reprogram*

*your thinking.*

Amen

*Our lesson from 1 Kings 17:17-24 is a healing story about how  
the Prophet Elijah brings a child back to life,  
but it is not a method that is recommended these days...*

- <sup>17</sup> Several days later, the son of the woman who owned the house got sick,  
and he kept getting worse, until finally he died.
- <sup>18</sup> The woman shouted at Elijah,  
“What have I done to you? I thought you were God’s prophet.  
Did you come here to cause the death of my son as a reminder  
that I’ve sinned against God?”
- <sup>19</sup> “Bring me your son,” Elijah said. Then he took the boy from her arms  
and carried him upstairs to the room where he was staying.  
Elijah laid the boy on his bed  
<sup>20</sup> and prayed,  
“LORD God, why did you do such a terrible thing to this woman?  
She’s letting me stay here, and now you’ve let her son die.”
- <sup>21</sup> Elijah stretched himself out over the boy three times, while praying,  
“LORD God, bring this boy back to life!”
- <sup>22</sup> The LORD answered Elijah’s prayer,  
and the boy started breathing again.
- <sup>23</sup> Elijah picked him up and carried him downstairs.  
He gave the boy to his mother and said,  
“Look, your son is alive.”
- <sup>24</sup> “You are God’s prophet!” the woman replied.  
“Now I know that you really do speak for the LORD.”

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

Mark 5:21-43

- <sup>21</sup> And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side,  
a great crowd gathered about him; and he was beside the sea.
- <sup>22</sup> Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Ja'irus by name;  
and seeing him, he fell at his feet,
- <sup>23</sup> and besought him, saying,  
"My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her,  
so that she may be made well, and live."
- <sup>24</sup> And he went with him.  
And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.
- <sup>25</sup> And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years,  
<sup>26</sup> and who had suffered much under many physicians,  
and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.
- <sup>27</sup> She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd  
and touched his garment.
- <sup>28</sup> For she said,  
"If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well."
- <sup>29</sup> And immediately the hemorrhage ceased;  
and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.
- <sup>30</sup> And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him,  
immediately turned about in the crowd, and said,  
"Who touched my garments?"
- <sup>31</sup> And his disciples said to him,  
"You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say,  
'Who touched me?'"
- <sup>32</sup> And he looked around to see who had done it.  
<sup>33</sup> But the woman, knowing what had been done to her,  
came in fear and trembling and fell down before him,  
and told him the whole truth.
- <sup>34</sup> And he said to her,  
"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace,  
and be healed of your disease."
- <sup>35</sup> While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said,  
"Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"
- <sup>36</sup> But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue,  
"Do not fear, only believe."
- <sup>37</sup> And he allowed no one to follow him except  
Peter and James and John the brother of James.
- <sup>38</sup> When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult,  
and people weeping and wailing loudly.
- <sup>39</sup> And when he had entered, he said to them,  
"Why do you make a tumult and weep?  
The child is not dead but sleeping."
- <sup>40</sup> And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside,  
and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him,  
and went in where the child was.
- <sup>41</sup> Taking her by the hand he said to her,  
"Tal'itha cu'mi"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."
- <sup>42</sup> And immediately the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years of age),  
and they were immediately overcome with amazement.
- <sup>43</sup> And he strictly charged them that no one should know this,  
and told them to give her something to eat.