

“A Little Child Shall Lead Them”

By Shavonn Lynch

As I sat down to reflect on today’s scriptural passages, I debated on what direction I would go. I could reflect on the notion of children being a representative of the marginalized groups of people relegated to the ranks of second-class citizens with nothing to offer the larger dominate society. Those on the margins whom we are called to care for and to serve. I could talk about the dependency of the child on the parent to provide love, warmth, comfort and protection as we are created to depend on God, although we often turn aside and depend on our own limited abilities and capabilities. But the question that repeatedly comes to mind as I reflect on today’s passage is “What can the children teach us about who we are as adults?” There is an adage that goes “children should be seen and not heard.” The adage suggest that children play a passive role in society and have nothing to contribute. However, as we see in our scripture readings for today Jesus uses children to illustrate his teachings to the disciples.

In our first scripture passage we hear the disciples argue over who is the greatest among them, for they are concerned about status and position within the group. The disciples’ argument about who is the greatest begs the question, “if there is a greatest among the disciples, is there then also a least among them? Jesus does not engage in the argument among the disciples he instead, positions a child among the disciples, and tells them that “whoever seeks to be the first must be the last of all and servant of all.” The one who is the greatest among them is not the one of highest position or status but the lowest, the humblest, the child. The child represents the least among them for a child is not seen as a contributing member of society and in a world were hospitality based on reciprocity the inability to contribute to the society places you in a lowly position.

Jesus further instructs that disciples that how one treats the child, the lowest, signifies how they see the child and who they see in the child. When you turn away from the child you turn away from Jesus but when you welcome the child, you welcome God,

for God values those whom society deems the lowest, just as God values the child who is among them. Who is the greatest among the disciples may be of significance among the disciples but has no bearing on Jesus Christ for he is concerned about the lowest the, ones the disciples are called to serve.

In our second scripture passage we hear the Jesus and his disciples have left Capernaum and have traveled to a region beyond the Jordan. As Jesus and his disciples journey together Jesus continues to teach the disciples the radical notion that the first shall be the last and the last shall be the first in the kingdom of God. Once again, we see that our friends, the disciples have not yet grasped this concept Jesus is trying to teach them. As people bring children to Jesus so that they may be blessed by Jesus the disciples try to intervene, wanting to prevent the children from being brought into Jesus' presence. Jesus, however, rebukes the disciples, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is 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." Having spoken these words Jesus gathers the children into himself and blesses them. God's love is poured out over the children as Jesus embraces them. Through this act of embracing the little children into himself Jesus is demonstrating to the disciples once again that his love, God's love is open and welcoming to all, and that the children must not be hindered from receiving this love.

Now Clearly once one is an adult, they cannot again become a child, the disciples are not going to return to the days of their childhood and neither are we, and certainly Jesus is not advocating for the disciples to act like little children. So, what is it that we are to learn from Jesus embracing the little children? What do the little children have to teach us about entering the kingdom of God? Well, there are still some who believe in the adage that children should be seen and not heard; that we do not have to take into consideration their thoughts, words, feelings, or actions. There are others who still believe that children should do what we say and not what we do. Perhaps that is because sometimes our actions and behaviors are more childish then theirs and we expect them to

act in ways we are ourselves are not willing to act. We, like the disciples who walked with Jesus, cannot grasp the concept of why Jesus embraces the little children, what are the children going to teach us.

There are two battles raging in this country right now. There is the battle over COVID-19, its severity, especially among people who are in higher risk categories, its treatment, its economic effects, and the disparity between people of color and people who are poor being effected in higher numbers. The other battle, the other battle is a deeply personal battle. As someone who has a history of asthma and is a diabetic, I can hide the fact that I am in a higher risk category for getting COVID-19. No one has to know, unless I tell them. But the battle over whether Black Lives Matter is not one I can hide from or escape from. As an African American woman, the battle is mine to wage every day, every day, every single day of my life. I cannot hide the color of my skin, and I cannot make anyone see the worth of my black life. Now it would be easy to believe these battles are completely unrelated to one another, but the reality is that the heart of these battles is the idea of how we treat those we see as the lowest or the least among us. How do we relate to people whose contribution to the larger society is seen as less than and where do the children fit in?

Jesus and the disciples had different perspectives on where the children fit in. Jesus embraces the children, bringing them into himself. Jesus actions of welcoming the children contrast the disciples' repulsion of them. Being of lowly status, the children are not seen, by the disciples, as worthy of Jesus' attention, let alone his embrace. But when the people gathered around Jesus, they did not hesitate to bring their children to Jesus because they understood that Jesus valued their children in a way that the world around them did not and would welcome them into himself has the world around had not.

In this time of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter protests we can ask ourselves o do we see the value of the little children as Jesus did or are, we more like the disciples? For many of us who use Facebook on a frequent or semi-frequent basis, we know that Facebook can offer up hope and it can offer up despair. Users are exposed to images, and

posts of love and hate, happiness and sorrow, joy, and pain. One video that has been circulated around Facebook is that of Gianna Floyd, George Floyd's six-year old daughter, saying "Daddy changed the world." The smile on young Gianna's face as she makes this declarative statement is both heart-warming and heart wrenching. We can either take her statement, "Daddy changed the world, and find in her child-like perspective hope or we can dismiss it as the ramblings of a child too small to understand the turmoil that is swirling all around her in a world filled with chaos.

In lieu of today's children's message there will be a watch party to view the video presentation orchestrated by Chris Patch. In this video presentation children and youth will share their testimonies and reflections on how they are doing and where they see God right now in their lives. The perspective of a child is too often lost, forgotten, ignored or excluded but children provide for us a perspective that we as adult have lost or let go of in the vast wisdom, acknowledge and understanding we profess to proclaim. Listen, what are the voices of the children saying? What questions do they pose for us about COVID-19 and why they can't back to school or play with their friends; what questions do they ask about the protests, riots and looting and what are they hearing in our responses to their questions, in our actions or inactions, and in our expectations of them as they navigate the chaos around them. What will we hear when we listen to the voices of our children and youth as speak through their testimonies? Will we hear the voices of the little children or the ramblings of a child?

Jesus Christ spoke to the disciples say, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as little child will never enter it." We must humble ourselves taking the lowly position of one who is need of Jesus Christ. That is the message that Jesus Christ was trying to teach the disciples. That is the message that Jesus Christ has for us today. Jesus Christ entered the world not as a mighty warrior, or a powerful king, but as an infant child, humbled and lowly. But the infant child Jesus Christ is not an ordinary child, no the infant child Jesus changed the world when he entered in. If we humble ourselves like the little children, we can too. Thanks be to God. Amen.