

05/08/2022 Worship Service Mother's Day - Parent/Child Dedication

Morning Prayer – Pastor Lois Harder

Loving God, we are grateful for your presence with us and your care for us. Thank you for showing your love to us through family and friends – those with whom we have meaningful, nurturing relationships. We recognize that in these important relationships we find support and security as well as challenge and growth – the things we need to flourish and mature in our faith and our life. O God, we pray for children and others who *don't* have those important people in their lives. Often through no fault of their own, through the decisions or circumstances of others, there are children who are vulnerable, neglected, mistreated. We pray, God, for your Spirit to minister, to heal, to bring wholeness to such as these. Thank you for teachers, for counselors, for those whose life work is to bring your love and light to the lives of children.

We pray for the children of this church and for their parents and families, their teachers and those who interact with them. We thank you, God, for safe travels for those who went to Dallas these past few days. We ask for your guidance, patience and perseverance in the coming days as the school year wraps up. We pray for the children and grown-ups who will participate in VBS in a few weeks. O God, grant hearts that are open to your love, minds that are ready to embrace the truth in the Bible stories that will be told, spirits that are willing to give generously of time, energy and resources so that the message of your love and care will come through to each child. We pray for your Spirit to bless the efforts being made so that VBS can be a pathway to faithful growth and learning.

We pray for Pastor Caleb, Beth, Austin and Josiah as they celebrate Caleb's sister's wedding yesterday and continue to be with family and friends. Grant them safe travel mercies.

O God, we pray for those in our midst who are grieving the loss of loved ones – especially for Irvin Goertzen and his family at the death of his sister Edna Ruth, and including the Nikkel family as they all grieve the passing of Arylis. We also give you thanks, God, for these two significant women in the Goertzen and Nikkel families – thank you for their lives and all that they have meant. Thank you for their release from pain and illness in these human bodies and for the fullness of joy and healing they have now, in your eternal presence. We also pray for those whose grief is not so recent, but we acknowledge that grief continues and stays with us, becoming part of us as we experience life without our loved ones. Be especially with those, God, for whom this Mother's Day may be a reminder of those who have nurtured us or who we have cared for, who are no longer present. Send your Spirit of comfort, of love and hope.

We know that you are the great healer, Creator God. We thank you for the amazing capacity our bodies have for fending off illness and for healing from wounds. We ask for healing for Greg Washmon, for others whose bodies are healing. We pray for those who are experiencing illnesses of all sorts. Give them strength, tenacity, the will to keep working with their bodies to regain health. Give them hope and trust in you, God. We pray for those who are old, whose bodies and spirits are tired. Be close to them and let them know your love.

Dear Lord, sometimes it seems easiest to keep our eyes down, so that we only see a small part of the world, the people and the situations directly in front of us – and even that can

seem like a lot! But as we pray, we acknowledge the world. We acknowledge and grieve the ways people hurt one another, the injustices that are done, the power imbalances that create pain, the biases and fear stoked between groups of people who don't understand each another. Lord, we pray that differences could be seen as part of your creative diversity, that those whose lives hang in the balance of survival would be seen, cared for, resources shared so that there is enough for all. We pray for those whose lives are upended by war, famine, draught, fires or floods. We thank you for the work of organizations like the Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Disaster Service, and others who work to share your love and light in the world. Move each of us to continue to lift our eyes, open our hearts, be your messengers. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

It's a gift to have Alyssa and her friends Luke and Sadie here this morning to share their music with us! They have two songs and they'll sing them back to back. During their second song we'll take up the offering.

Prayer of Dedication –

Please stand for prayer. For all that we have and all that we are, we give you thanks, O God. We offer these gifts of money to you and we pray that they would be used wisely and in ways that show our love for you. Amen.

Grad Recognition

Alyssa – would you come back up here for a moment, please? And Nathaniel Schmucker – your name is not in the bulletin, I'm sorry! But would you come up too? Alyssa, I'm so glad you could be here this morning, both to bring us such wonderful music AND so that we can celebrate your up-coming graduation from Hesston College! And Nathaniel – we recognize and celebrate YOUR upcoming graduation from Bethel College. We're a little early – graduation is next weekend, but right after graduation comes the European Choir Tour for both Hesston and Bethel – and Alyssa and Nathaniel will both be with their school's choir tours on May 22 when we'll recognize the other graduates. So, Alyssa – could you tell us, please, the degree you're graduating with and what your plans are for the summer and the fall? Nathaniel – the same...

Here is a gift for each of you, on behalf of the congregation. Congratulations! We're proud of you, we wish you God's continued guidance and blessings, we'll keep you in our prayers.

Scripture

Sermon – Pastor Lois

In these two passages we find what could look, at first glance, like two simple instructions – one from the OT about child-rearing and one from the NT about the place of children within the community. And while that's not wrong, it's also not quite complete. First of all, there are very few Biblical instructions that are really "simple", both to understand and to follow, and second, these passages really aren't just about children. There's good news here for all of us!

Deuteronomy is part of the law, the Torah. It's part of what God gave to Moses and then instructed him to impart to the people – rules for how to live within the covenant that God had made with them. You know, stuff like the Ten Commandments and how to live differently than the people all around them were living so that they could see that the God of the Hebrew people was different than their gods. The law was all about how to live out the covenant and how it was that covenant with God that set the Hebrew people apart from other people, so that their very lives gave witness to this relationship that they were in with Yahweh, their Creator. And so this mandate that we read in chapter 11 is part of that. Love the Lord your God and keep his commandments and oh, by the way, remember that it wasn't your children who saw how God rescued you from the Egyptians – it was YOU who witnessed those great acts of God! And so because YOU grown-ups have experienced God's goodness and guidance and salvation, it's up to you to teach these things to your children, to talk about them when you're at home and when you're traveling, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. In other words, tell your children about your own faith experiences. Tell them about how God has been faithful to you, about ways you've seen God move and save and love you. Share with them ways that you've witnessed and experienced God's presence in your life. That act of talking with your children about God is a way of honoring the covenant, bringing God into the everydayness of you and your children's lives. Teach this to your children.

And then in the gospel of Mark, we read these lovely verses that Delbert demonstrated so beautifully. Jesus was traveling and teaching, healing and doing miraculous things, as he did. And all the while, he was always trying to help his disciples to decipher and interpret the law in ways that would reveal and bring God's kingdom. So we have that connection, that common thread between these two texts of God's faithful people trying to understand and live according to the covenant, the law. But you'll remember that the Pharisees and scribes were constantly trying to use (or misuse) the law to trap Jesus. And it's in the midst of this kind of situation that we find Jesus in Mark, chapter 10. He was surrounded by crowds and the Pharisees were there, testing him. And in that scenario, people were bringing little children to him so he could touch them. Just a few verses before this, in chapter 9 Jesus had made an example of a little child to quiet the disciples' argument about which of them was the greatest. He took a little child in his arms and said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." And now, apparently having forgotten that experience almost as soon as it had happened, the disciples were again missing the point of Jesus' ministry of inclusivity and upside down expectations about who is a part of God's kingdom.

To be fair, the disciples were simply trying to enforce what would have been completely normal 1st century social mores. Children were not considered to be whole, autonomous people with any rights or self-determination. Like women in that time, children were considered property. So for Jesus to say, "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these" would likely not have been heard as a charming, sentimental expression. In fact, it would have been difficult for the listeners to really hear it at all because it would have seemed so strange an idea. Children had absolutely no power or status; they were considered completely unimportant, weak, dependent. Jesus had turned the idea of greatness on its head. He was teaching his disciples

about the need to embrace humility, to relinquish the need for control, to trust God completely, to approach God as a child.

So as we welcome these little ones and pledge our support to their parents, I hope we can remember these two things. First, to teach and share with our children about our own experiences of God's steadfast faithfulness and also to help them be open to God's upside down and unexpected ways of working in the world. Perhaps our children can teach that to us!

Hymn 515 *O Little Children, Gather*

Garrett and Brittany, Weston and Courtney, I invite you and your parents to come forward now with your children.

A warm welcome to Ron and Patsy Dirksen, Brittany's parents as well as to Ron and Patty Traxson, Courtney's folks – and, of course, Ann and Myron Hiebert, parents of Weston and Garrett. It's wonderful to have you all here! And Courtney's brother is also here... (others?)

These loving grandparents will offer their blessings to Reagan and Haydin now.

As you bring your children for dedication it is, of course, an act of praising and thanking God. And it is also bringing your children into a relationship with the body of Christ – the church. When children are presented to God and to the church, they are placed in the care of the church. With Christian parents, and grandparents, the children can grow up with and come to their own understanding of their parents' faith. As parents dedicate their children, they are committing themselves to this calling.

As we heard earlier, Jesus made children a model of faith. Because children are dependent and trusting, they are also more receptive to God's presence in their lives. It's the task, then, of families and the church to nurture this faith and to prepare children for a time when they are more mature and can make their own decision to accept Christ and the call to follow him in their lives. So parents, families, and we, as a congregation, share great joy as well as a great responsibility to nurture our children.

Courtney and Weston – Brittany and Garrett, as you bring Haydin Rose and Reagan Laine for blessing by God in this congregation, do you consecrate yourselves as parents to bring your children up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord? (we do)

Is it your purpose to try to shape your family life by caring for one another, sharing in God's word, in prayer and Christian fellowship so that Reagan and Haydin will be helped to know and love Christ as Lord and Savior? *(it is...As Christian parents we are thankful for the privilege of parenthood. We recognize that we have a very special role in the life of our child, helping her to know and to love God. We pledge ourselves to the task of parenthood with love, patience, with firmness and with faith; trusting God to guide and strengthen us. We ask for the support of you, the congregation, in active partnership in our task of parenting. We need your encouragement. We entrust our children to your loving care in this community of faith.*

Garrett and Brittany, Weston and Courtney – may the God who has entrusted you with this child grant you fullness of love in raising her. May God grant you to live lives of faithfulness to the gospel before your children so that they might know the ways of God's kingdom.

Reagan Laine, (Haydin Rose) may the God who created you, who sent Christ Jesus to redeem you and the Spirit to dwell within you, may this God watch over you, bless you and keep you always. As you grow may you come to know the love and presence of God in your life and welcome Jesus into your heart. In the name of the God who gives us birth. Amen.

As you can see, there on the table, is a rose for each family, there's a certificate of dedication, a faith marker book for you to keep photos and written memories of your child's faith journey and there is also a memory box for Reagan and there will be a step-stool for Haydin. Many thanks to Kim Voth and Nicole Hein, the early childhood coordinators for seeing to each of these meaningful items and to Tim Goertzen for his gift of beautiful craftsmanship offered to make the memory boxes and step stools.

I invite you now to stand and respond with the words of support and covenant at number 970.

Leader: Garrett and Brittany, Weston and Courtney, you have offered Reagan and Haydin to the strong and tender care of God.

All: We rejoice with you and give thanks for the gift of your child.

With God as our guide, we will share in your child's nurture and well-being.

We will support, by our example and words, your efforts to provide a loving and caring home where trust in God grows and Christ may be known.

Our prayers are with you and for you.

May our shared life and witness help you grow as a family in faithfulness and joy.

Hymn 510 *Today Earth is Singing*

Hymn 120 *For the Beauty of the Earth*

Benediction –

O God, you are witness to the covenant that Garrett and Brittany, Weston and Courtney and this congregation have made this morning. Now we ask that your Spirit would consecrate this covenant. You have surrounded these children with your love from before their birth, and you will extend your love to them throughout their lives. We pray that you give us and their parents the wisdom and grace to love them and to prepare them – so far as it depends on us – to receive your love and follow Jesus when they are of age.

Go with us now, out into your world, ready to proclaim your faithfulness and to stay alert to your surprising ways, God and follow you with child-like trust. Amen.