

05-11-2025 Words of Worship

Welcome –

It's so good to be together on this beautiful, spring, Mother's Day morning. Our service has two parts this morning. First we'll focus on child and parent dedications – the importance of recognizing children as a gift from God, the commitment that parents make to receive their children with gratitude, to teach them about Jesus and to dedicate themselves and their children back into the care of God. The second part of the service follows on the heels of the first, as we, again, recognize our children as a gift from God, but as graduates we recognize they're getting older and making important transitions, celebrating accomplishments. These are significant and special times to recall God's faithful love and guidance throughout our lives.

There's a lovely poem by Mary Oliver that I'd like to share as we enter this first part of the service as we focus on teaching our children in their youngest years.

Its called "Upstream":

Teach the children. We don't matter so much, but the children do. Show them daisies and the pale hepatica. Teach them the taste of sassafras and wintergreen. The lives of the blue sailors, mallow, sunbursts, the moccasin-flowers. And the frisky ones – inkberry, lamb's-quarters, blueberries. And the aromatic ones – rosemary, oregano. Give them peppermint to put in their pockets as they go to school. Give them the fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms. Attention is the beginning of devotion.

What are the **opportunities** or activities that you'd like to share with one another this morning?

- Sr. Coffee this Friday morning – Virgil Penner sharing his artwork.

Call to Worship

Prayer – God of love, we're gathered here in the presence of one another and of your Holy Spirit. Guide us and bless us as we worship with words and songs, with prayers and praises. Move among us so we *know* your presence and love. Amen.

Morning Prayer

Before we pray I want to let you know that DaLora Funk had successful knee replacement on Thursday and is recuperating at home. Her physical therapy will start tomorrow; she appreciates our prayers. Also, Leona Schroeder called me yesterday to ask us to pray for her great-grandson Alex, who is 8 months old and will have procedure on his heart this Tuesday in KS City at the Children's Mercy Hospital. Let's pray.

Dear God, we thank you today for mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers, aunts... the many women who have nurtured and cared for us in the course of our lives. We thank you for the ways they've showed us your love and we ask for your blessing on them today. We ask for your peace and comfort for those who are grieving the loss of their mothers and nurturers. We think particularly of Kim Voth whose mother, Jolynn we honored yesterday at her memorial service. We pray also for Denise and Doug Duerksen as they grieve the passing of their father, Rodney. We pray for Duane and Wes as they grieve the loss of their brother. Be with these families in the coming days and weeks.

God, we know that you are the great healer – of our bodies, our spirits and our minds. We pray for healing – for DeLora’s knee, for Leona’s great grandson Alex’s heart, for continued healing for Lois Janzen and for others we know and love who need your healing touch. In these moments of silence, God, we pray for those who long for healing...

There is so much healing needed in our world. We pray for the health of our planet, God. Give us wisdom and courage to make decisions about how we live that lead to the healing of the earth. We pray for those who live in the midst of war and injustice, Palestinians and Sudanese, Ukrainians and Pakistanis whose land, homes and lives are being destroyed. We pray for the health of our own nation, God. For the survival of laws that were intended to create justice and the integrity of systems that were meant to support and help people. We know, God, that our nation is flawed, we confess that there is much reform and repair needed. We pray for wisdom and humility – for changes that would be made in the interest of lifting up the poor, bringing justice to the oppressed and release to the captives. We pray for your kingdom to come on earth – as it is in heaven.

In the midst of our prayers of petition, God, we also bring our praises. We are thankful for opportunities to learn, to grow and achieve, to meet the potential with which you’ve created us. Thank you for our graduates in this season, for the honor of being able to earn a promotion from one level of learning to the next. Help us never to take the experience of learning for granted; it is a gift to be able to attend school, to learn how to think, how to interact with others, how to become stronger, more accomplished, more kind, how to view the world more broadly.

Continue to be with us now, through the rest of this worship service and into the coming days, we pray for the presence and guidance of your Holy Spirit in each of our lives. Amen.

Offering prayer – For your steadfast love and goodness, we thank you, O Lord. We ask you to receive these gifts of our money with our humble gratitude – a token returned to you in thankfulness for your abundant provisions. Amen.

Scripture – Deuteronomy 11:1-2, 7, 18-21; Mark 10:13-16

Reflection –

In these two passages we have what might appear to be two, simple instructions – one from the OT about child-rearing and one from the NT about the place of children in 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” – to understand OR to follow, and second, these passages really aren’t only 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 the 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... remember that it wasn’t your children who saw how God rescued you from the Egyptians – it was YOU who witnesses 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 about Jesus and the children. 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 God 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 remember that the Pharisees and the 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 their children to him so he could touch them and bless 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 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. Who knows... maybe our children can teach that to us! Let's listen now as Renae leads us in worship with a song.

Worship Music – Renae VT 519

Parent/Child Dedication

Brianna and Preston, Brittany and Garrett, I invite you and your folks to come forward now with your children.

A warm welcome to Lynel and Vickie and Ron and Patsy Dirksen, Brittany's parents, along with Ann, Garrett's mom. We are missing Myron this morning. These loving grandparents will offer their prayers of blessing for Evelyn and Quinn now.

As you bring your children for dedication it is an act of praising and thanking God. And it's 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.

Brianna and Preston – Brittany and Garrett, do you bring Evelyn Grace and Quinn Taylor 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 Evelyn and Quinn 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.)

Preston and Brianna – Garrett and Brittany, 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.

Evelyn Grace (Quinn Taylor) 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 step stool for each girl. Many thanks to Kim Voth, the early childhood coordinator for seeing to each of these meaningful items and to Tim Goertzen for his gift of beautiful craftsmanship offered to make the step stools.

I invite all of you now to stand and respond with the words of support and blessing at number 970 and reading right on through 971.

Leader: Brianna and Preston, Brittany and Garrett, you have offered Evelyn and Quinn 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.

People: God, maker of galaxies who numbers the hairs on our heads, we praise your name for the goodness of creation and for all the blessings of this life.

Leader: We give you thanks for Evelyn and Quinn. As Jesus took children into his arms and blessed them, each child is held and blessed, and belongs to your reign. By your grace, raise Evelyn and Quinn and all your children to your glory.

People: Through your Spirit, lead them to faith in Christ, sustain them in misfortune and danger, and let the love they give and receive abound. In your power, grant eternal life, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may be seated.

Now we move from our youngest children to the older ones and we hear these words as encouraging reminders to our graduates. These are good words for all of us!

Colossians 2:1-8

Colossae was a big, cosmopolitan city with people from lots of different backgrounds, traditions and cultures. The education and the world view was pretty broad and all-encompassing, so there was a wide variety of life choices and rituals and celebrations that were meaningful or significant for various people. For the young Jesus –followers, there could be some struggles or temptations to adopt some life choices that didn't line up with their new-found faith in Jesus. This passage offers three warnings along with three reminders:

First – don't let anyone capture or ensnare you or lure you off the path with what some have called "high-sounding nonsense" or deceit. You'll probably come across some people in this world who have evil intent with their philosophy or the way they use words to manipulate or plant seeds of fear. Remember – the good news of Jesus is not just words or rituals or regulations – following Jesus is a way of living! The verb that's sometimes translated "live" when it says we live in him, is literally "walk". So keep moving, living, walking in the ways of Jesus – and walk together! None of us is equipped or able to walk this journey alone. Look out for one another. Keep each other on the path and stay alert for traps or snares.

Second – don't let anyone control you with legalistic requirements. Stay rooted and grounded in Christ, knowing that your life and identity are in him. Throughout our lives we shape our identity by trying to make meaning of our life and experiences. It's crucial to fellowship with others in the church and establish collective memories (like you have!) that celebrate Christ's presence and faithfulness in our lives. When we recall together times of experiencing Jesus' Spirit with us, we get a sense of resilience, power and purpose in Christ.

And finally, don't get tripped up thinking that you have to "take on" others' traditions or ways of doing things. There are lots of wonderful traditions, experiences that bring people together for all kinds of reasons. But Paul is reminding us to double-check and make sure that Jesus is at the center of whatever we're doing. So as you move on to next chapters of your lives, remember what you've learned about what matters on your faith journey... that it's not the traditions or the

rituals themselves, but finding Jesus within them and building on what you've already experienced.

As we each continue to learn and deepen our faith, may we also continue to practice calling on Jesus and his wisdom. May we live in gratitude for his steadfast love and trust that he'll keep moving and walking with us every day.

College graduates and those who've been promoted from the 8th grade on to High School, I invite you all to come up to receive your gifts and college grads, if you'll come to the mic and just tell us briefly what's next for you....

I also should have included Jerah Schmidt who graduated from KS City University with a Master's in Biomedical Sciences.

Our three 8th graders who've been promoted to High School are Rosie, Myra and Lilly.

I invite you to stand for our response to these young people and for the sending hymn. The **response is number 955**

Come among us, Holy Spirit, and create a community of learning.

Help us grow in wisdom and understanding, in skill and strength, in knowledge that honors you.

Teach us to know you, ourselves, and our neighbors more fully, to see your presence in the world more clearly, to love more deeply – with heart, soul, mind and strength.

Form us as doers of justice and lovers of mercy as we walk humbly with you and one another on this path of learning. Amen.

Sending song – VT 395 May You Be Rooted and Grounded

Benediction – Go in the confidence of being rooted and grounded in God's love. Amen.