

**March 10<sup>th</sup> 2013: Dedication service for Joshah Stinson: Matt 18:1-11, 19:13-15**  
**"Pointing Our Children Towards Our Father"**

An infant dedication service such as the one we had today would have to be one of my favourite things. I enjoy children and to have the honour of holding and praying for an infant in the name of Jesus is so special. And I firmly believe that when we appreciate the miracle of a little baby, and when we extend ourselves towards children in love, we truly please Jesus, for that's how He acted.

We had that children's song earlier—Jesus and Me—and it's a song I love; not just because the tune is so cheerful but because the words ring so true for little children and for big old children like me. And when I sing that verse about inviting Jesus to tea I envisage in my mind a little one sitting on the floor with one of those tiny tea sets. Pouring pretend tea out of a tiny teapot into a tiny cup, and saying to Jesus, 'Will you come and have tea with me.' And I believe He would be there like a shot. Cross legged on the carpet with a smile on His face.

For I sense from passages of Scripture such as the two from Matthew that we read today, that Jesus had a really strong connection with children. For example Matt 18:1-11.

This is principally a strong teaching passage about the need to enter God's Kingdom or to become a Christian in a very humble way. Not to think you can earn your way in by doing stuff or that you deserve to be welcomed in because you are so important, but that there is a need to see yourself on the same level as everyone else. Criminal or cardinal we all come as sinners unable to make ourselves right before God, and all needing from Him equal mercy; equal grace. We all come with the simple faith of a child.

So the child in the midst is used by Jesus as an illustration of this. But this little boy or little girl is much more than just an illustration. They stand there because Jesus called them to do so. They came to Him when He called because they trusted in His goodness. They were attracted by the love they saw in Him. Somehow this child knew that Jesus loved and valued them so they had no hesitation in doing what He asked.

And although Jesus seems to talk at one point about children and another about new believers, when He said in v10,

***"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."***

I am convinced that He had the little children in mind.

Jesus prized children and they knew this and felt safe in His presence. And it seems that the parents began to see this too for not long after this experience we read in 19:13

***Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.***

They felt so safe in bringing their little infants to Him. They wanted Jesus to pray a blessing down on their child. And I feel that's it's important for us to note here that directly beforehand Jesus had been responding to questions about divorce, and had emphasized how a strong, ongoing marriage is so important in the sight of God. So necessary for the sake of a man and a woman, and however many children God might entrust them with.

And straight after that talk we find parents, who in that society would have been married to each other, now bringing their infants to Jesus. A sign of their commitment to be godly parents as well as seeking a blessing for their child.

And it is here that we see our Biblical basis for this act of infant dedication this morning. It doesn't make a child a Christian. We trust God that they will make that decision for themselves when they are older. But because the parents dedicate themselves to being godly parents, and also seek to bring their child constantly to Jesus in prayer, then their child or children are blessed with this incredible spiritual advantage in life.

One interesting point from this account is that the parents may have seen how much Jesus valued and loved infants, but His disciples had obviously not got that message. They rebuked the parents for bringing their babies—probably noisy babies—to Jesus, because they didn't believe that He should be bothered with them. And Mark tells us that Jesus was indignant with His disciples. A word that means 'mightily displeased'. Extremely cross.

( I recall a service before I became a preacher myself.....)

So I believe that we can see quite clearly from Scripture just how much Jesus values children and how great it is when parents commit themselves in a service such as this, to being godly parents and seeking the blessing of Jesus on their children.

But the responsibility that parents, grandparents,.....and the church family as a whole, has for the spiritual growth of our children does not stop there.

There is an ongoing need for all, at different levels of course, to continue through the child's life to point them towards our heavenly father.

Particularly is this true for parents who themselves love Jesus. The priority of bringing a child up in an atmosphere of love for God and worship within the family of God's people cannot be over stated.

Children, whatever their age, are affected more in their spiritual journey by the things that their parents and grandparents do, say, and not do or say, because they are believers in Jesus, than anything else. Our lives are open all the time to our children and, less so, to our grandchildren, and if we truly want them to be with us in heaven

one day, then we cannot afford to for any less than our best in our living for Jesus. We need to continually point them to God as our Father and, through acceptance of Christ, their Father.

This came home to me recently while reading the following story from Max Lucado's book on Grace. It tells about an eight year old boy, Lee, who along with his two brothers had been living in an orphanage in America during the 1920's for two years. Then one day they were all taken to a train station in New York and put on The Orphan Train with about 40 or 50 other orphans. This train went out into the rural areas and stopped at different stations where prospective parents would come and view them before choosing the ones they wished to adopt. At a station in Texas the younger brother was adopted. At another station Lee and his other brother were adopted but after a short time Lee was sent to another home, the home of a farming family. He had never been on a farm before and he got in trouble when he opened the door of the chicks' cages and the angry farmer sent him away. Finally he was taken to the home of a tall man and a short, plump woman. During the first supper Lee said nothing. He went to bed making plans to run away. The next morning they seated him at a breakfast of biscuits and gravy. This is what he goes on to say.....p123 GRACE by Max Lucado

That story really moved me because I saw in it how a small thing like a heartfelt prayer of thanks to God, and a humble recognition of His presence as "our Father." And a sincere believe in the privilege of being a parent, chosen as such by God, had such an impact upon that boy.

And although I recognize that the outcome for Lee is not always, and maybe not often the way it happens for others, who are just as committed to being good parents as the Nailings were. It reveals to me the hope that always exists, that if we do our part in pointing our children, and their children to our Heavenly Father, then along the way the miracle of new birth can happen, even if it takes years and even decades to do so.

So today, in the knowledge of the love God has for children, even when they stop being children. Let us commit ourselves as parents, grandparents, and members of this church family, to constantly seek to point them though the things we do and say, towards our God as the Father whom we love, and who we are convinced, loves them too.