

## “Scripture thru Different Eyes”

Rev. Jayneann McIntosh, Lead Pastor  
First United Methodist Church of Wausau  
June 2, 2019

Would you open your bulletin and draw a circle somewhere in the space, big enough to write some words in it? Now, write some words that describe children – the good, the best, the less-good. You can write as many as you’d like but try to write at least three to five. My words are “wonder-filled,” “messy” and “imaginative.” What are yours?

Today we begin our new summer worship series. Each week we will open ourselves to what God would have us learn through a child’s perspective. We’ll begin with some familiar words about children at the end of today’s scripture lesson.

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’”

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to [those] who cry to him day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to 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.”

*Luke 18:1-17*

There is so much for us to consider in this scripture. I chose it for that line, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them.” Yet how often do we read Bible passages without considering what comes before or after? Context is important. Luke puts these parts of Jesus’ story in this order for a reason. It’s up to us to figure out what that reason is.

Tenacity is not a word anyone mentioned. But who has not witnessed the child who will not cease in putting forth her case, who simply will not give up in her desire for a pony or an ice cream cone or your attention. Couldn’t this be one way that we could be more childlike in living

as God's people? Like the widow in our lesson, tenaciously pursuing what is right, steadfastly working toward our best life, doggedly going after God and God's hope for our best life – is this not our call?

Consider Ted, who took his first story to publishers all over New York and listened as one after another said, "No." It was 1937. Maybe publishers weren't looking for children's books or maybe it was that Ted's idea was so very different and they were afraid to take a chance on it. People tend not to take risks – not just in business but in all facets of our lives. Anyway, Ted and his wife Helen had poured over this manuscript – each word, each line – to make sure it was the best it could possibly be.

He went to fifteen publishers. Twenty, Twenty-five, each one looking at what he offered and then giving it back, uninterested. How does one continue to do this?

As he later told the story, Ted was walking home along Madison Avenue, stinging from the book's 27<sup>th</sup> rejection when he happened to bump into Mike McClintsock, an acquaintance from his college years. "What's that you're carrying?" Mike asked.

"It a book no one will publish. I'm lugging it home to burn."

Now, just that morning, Mike had been named editor of children's books at Vanguard Press. He invited Ted to come to his office later that afternoon. And that very day, Vanguard bought Ted's story, *And to think that I saw it on Mulburry Street!*

Since then, Vanguard has published over 600 million Dr. Seuss books worldwide. 28 years after Theodor Geisel's death, millions of copies are still sold each year. What if these two old friends had not taken this chance to catch up when they saw each other? Years later, Ted said that if he hadn't run into Mike that day, he'd have ended up in the dry-cleaning business.

Tenacity.

Receive what God offers as a small child, Jesus tells us. This summer sermon series is entitled, "The Gospel according to Dr. Seuss." Though not considering himself to be any great theologian, the author's stories – when considered alongside scripture – can offer us many lessons.

One of Seuss' most famous stories is *The Cat in the Hat*.

The sun did not shine it was too we to play  
so we sat in the house all that cold, cold wet day.  
I sat there with Sally. We sat there we two and I said,  
"How I wish we had something to do."

In case you haven't read it aloud hundreds of times, the Cat in the Hat comes to visit a pair of bored sibling on a rainy day. The fish in the bowl isn't thrilled about this stranger in the house while mom is away. Yet the Cat, whose ways are so different from these two well-behaved children, is a great one to add some fun to a rainy day.

I read this week that for curious people, learning new things is play. I love learning so this was affirming. Still, I'm not fully convinced. Play, for me, is physical – climbing trees, taking walks for no reason, planting and weeding.

Reflect on your life. When did you last play? When was the last time you laughed – laughed so hard you cried or your cheeks or sides were sore afterward or your bladder couldn't contain itself?

This is part of God's intention for all of us. To have fun and to celebrate this life that we've been given. This is what can get us through the most difficult times. So, I ask, in what ways do you let your inner Cat add fun to your life? Go ahead, take a moment and write some things down! Validate what gives you joy.

Now, let's turn the question around because while the Cat in the Hat only means to add joy to a dreary day, he goes overboard and his antics create utter havoc. In what ways have you let your inner Cat run too freely?

The OT wisdom writer tells us in the Book of Proverbs that "There is a path that may seem straight to someone, but in the end, it is a path to death." (14:12) Are there things in your life – maybe they're even good things – that are controlling your life? What habits have taken charge of your days? Do you take too many risks? Or too few? Are you, like the fish in the story, overly concerned about everything being just so? We each have ways that we would do better to give over to God, maybe praying, "I'm fixated on this to the point that I'm not living here and now, God, but I'm willing to be different. Please take charge."

Receive what God offers as a small child, Jesus tells us. What God offers is life abundant, with crazy adventures to help take the edge off the life-jarring sorrows and incredible relationships to bind us together in community.

Of course, we want to be aware that some of the ones who come into our lives are the close, forever kind of people and others are not. We have to be aware that the people we choose to let close to us will have more influence over us than, say, a Cat in a big hat on a rainy day.

The apostle Paul reminds us "[not to] be deceived, bad company corrupts good character." (1 Cor 15:33)

Naturally, we are supposed to reach out to the ones who are hurting and to accompany those who are going through tough times. We can be present with people who are making poor decisions. But we will want to be choosy about the ones we will listen to. We need to be selective about the ones who will hold us accountable and encourage us to walk in God's way. Living as God's people means being sensitive about who we let influence us.

We are called to live abundantly and generously this life that we are given. To persist beyond all injustice or injury. To laugh more than we boast. To know joy but not to the point that our life loses peace or balance. To remember that only by coming as a child – full of curiosity and wonder, but empty of conceit and self-importance – can we enter into God's realm.