

“Long Enough?”

June 24, 2018

Through the Eyes of a Child series

We’ve been on a journey together – challenged to consider faith through the eyes of a child. Jesus calls us to it when he invites the children to himself and then invites us to have child-like faith (not childish faith!). We started back in May with generosity – remembering the boy who shared his lunch, which turned into a miracle of Jesus!

We talked about trust in God – trust that kids give sometimes more freely than adults and trust that God doesn’t ever betray. We did the hokey pokey and talked about joy. We focused on honesty, questions, wonder, and even doubt – God invites us to be real in our relationship, and kids often are!

Jimmy Epplert shared stories of love and friendship. We heard the call to holy Sabbath time – to rest and be recreated in God’s image. In all of it, I’ve been challenged to think about how I need to be more childlike in my faith. I hope we’re more open to the way of children when it comes to faith.

Last week, we encountered Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father, and considered his place in Jesus’ life and faith and his own faith and trust in God during a difficult and uncertain time – and claimed our own place as models of faithful living for the kids in our lives – the legacy we leave. I keep thinking about Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus in light of recent events in our country and families separated, and I continue to pray for solutions that honor the humanity of all beloved children of God.

Images of children continue to be in front of us, and I’ll confess that I’ve had them on my heart. I’ve also thought about my kids, the families I know, and all of the families I’ve served in ministry over the last 17 years. I’ve thought about grief and loss in families. I’ve remembered people who prayed for a loved one to survive but then they didn’t, people who prayed for healing that didn’t come in the way they expected, or people who have walked with a child through illness or injury - and even death.

Not one of us is exempt from the pain of loss, and I’m not here to rate losses – what loss is worse than another. Loss is loss, and it hurts. And many times, we feel like God has let us down. God can feel far away when we’re grieving, and rest assured we’re not alone. We’re in good company with people in our biblical story

who cry out and ask God, “Where are you? What’s happening? Why did this happen?”

I’m thankful for your support for our Grief Share program here at Lake Harbor. Grief is real in our lives and in our community, and the time and space to acknowledge that is an important ministry. Whether it’s the death of a child, spouse, parent, sibling, or friend, the truth is that death is the great equalizer. We all face it; it’s hard, and we need support to come to God just as we are with all of the feelings we have. God can take it, and I believe God desires that we share our deepest feelings. That’s a faithful response.

Grief is the product of loving others, and we all feel it when we suffer the loss of a loved one no matter who it is. Death and grief bring out questions about heaven, but it’s usually kids who are willing to ask: “What’s heaven like? How am I going to know my loved ones? Will my pets be there? Will everyone look like I remember?” Have you ever asked that?

Facing death and grief, we often begin to consider our own mortality, meaning and purpose in our life, and the legacy we want to leave. Sometimes the death of a loved one is a catalyst for us to make positive changes. When her close friend died a few years ago, my mom made a commitment to take better care of herself.

After battling cancer and then walking with her husband through a cancer battle, a former parishioner’s motto is “Celebrate life.” Even this week as she shared that one of her children has been diagnosed with cancer, her motto remains the same: “Celebrate life.” She also asked for prayer because she claims the power of prayer in her life. It matters.

Facing death and grief can make us think about how we’re living and how we’re using our time. Are we going through the motions? Are we celebrating life? Are we living thankfully? Are we being generous with what we have?

Maybe you’ve heard this phrase: “Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.” Vicki Corona is often quoted when we talk about the value of each day and living life to the fullest. There’s deep truth in her words, and I hope we can point to incredible moments of grace and beauty in our lives.

And yet, to try to comfort someone who’s grieving with those words sounds pretty trite. We don’t have the answers of “why?” We need to be confident to say that we don’t know, and we can also be confident in claiming God’s presence with us in grief. God listens, and God cares.

In recent years, there's been more public acknowledgment of death, dying, and grief. In 1997, *Tuesdays with Morrie* was one catalyst. How many of you read it? Author Mitch Albom spent time with his beloved professor, Morrie Schwartz, who suffered from ALS. Albom gleaned wisdom as Morrie faced death, and the book was a bestseller. It touched us because it dealt with death and dying up front and it encouraged us to consider how we live.

Randy Pausch's "last lecture" published in 2008 has become required reading for high school and college students. Pausch was a computer science professor who was diagnosed with terminal cancer and took the opportunity to share wisdom about life and living.

More recently, political commentator Charles Krauthammer shared his battle with cancer, thanked the medical staff that had cared for him, his friends who had supported him, and his colleagues who had worked with him. And he ended with this: "I leave this life with no regrets. It was a wonderful life – full and complete with the great loves and great endeavors that make it worth living. I am sad to leave, but I leave with the knowledge that I lived the life that I intended."

Scripture encourages us to be realistic about our mortality and to live our earthly lives well. We hear it in Psalm 90: 12 **SHOW SLIDE**

¹²*Teach us to use wisely all the time we have.*

¹²*Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.*

And we hear it from Paul when he writes to the Corinthians. His perspective was different than ours. He lived assuming that Jesus would return in his lifetime. Our ancestors in faith were more willing to talk about death than we are. Let's face it: it's hard. We don't want to.

And yet, our faith is built on the promise of life eternal. We live this life well knowing that it matters - not because our good deeds will get us into heaven, but because it's our witness to the God we worship. We love and serve a Savior who lives and reigns forever. Jesus knows the pain of grief and loss and the joy of new life and hope. He knows it all because he lived it - fully human - and now is in heaven - fully divine.

What makes a life? What leaves a legacy? We think about those with some years of living and the wisdom they pass along, but what about children? Today we'll hear the words of a child named Gabe Valentine who lived with a rare disease called epidermolysis bullosa, a genetic disease that causes a person's skin to be fragile and blister easily. Even slight rubbing or scratching causes great injury.

Gabe's grandparents, Gail and Rick, are friends with Dave and Karen Booth, and as we planned this series and thought about the impact of children, Gabe's story came to mind. Gabe's family asked for prayers from his birth. Gabe lived a life full of witness and wisdom, and he died before his ninth birthday.

Gabe was a child whose faith was clear. He loved his family and the community around him. He also shared a vision of heaven as "a beautiful place" where bad things like car accidents couldn't cause pain, but good things like hugs and kisses would be felt clearly. Gabe touched many lives in almost nine years, and I invite you to hear words from his father, Mike. Mike's eulogy began with recounting Gabe's bravery and wisdom. Mike also talked about the gifts Gabe left for his family and community.

PLAY AUDIO EULOGY (read by Ivan and Luka Ivanov)

Touching words from a parent – and powerful words from a child. Mike goes on to thank the people that surrounded Gabe and their family. But we struggle to understand the "why?" That's true, no matter the circumstance. We don't have the answers, but we can share the truth that God walks with us in our grief and knows the deep pain we feel. We can offer other safe space to share and give comfort - not answers.

Friends, we know people whose hearts are full of grief. We know people who want answers to the tough questions – answers that don't come easily. Our calling isn't to offer easy answers, but to share the hope that comes from a relationship with God who grieves for us, who cares deeply for us, and who wants a relationship with each of us.

And we have the challenge to consider our lives and our legacy giving thanks for the people who have formed us - old and young. We can remember that a life is a lifetime long - no matter the length of it - and we can seek God's help: *Teach us to use wisely all the time we have.*

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE