

“Precious in God’s Sight: Answering the Call to Cherish and Protect Every Child”

Isaiah 43: 1-7

As I was sitting down to write this sermon, I was curious to see how many years Midway Christian Church has been celebrating and observing Children’s Sabbath. I know that every year since I have been here we have held this celebration and I have been here eight years. So I called our resident worship guru and asked her. Much to my surprise, she didn’t know the answer either. She could speculate but overall, she didn’t know when we, Midway Christian Church, began celebrating and observing Children’s Sabbath.

As I pondered this, I realized that maybe this was a good thing we don’t know the exact year we officially started. Maybe it just means that it has been a part of this church’s DNA for a while now and it was just a natural thing to do. Maybe it just means that this church has always recognized the value of children and the importance of being advocates for one of the groups in our community who doesn’t have the loudest voice. Maybe celebrating children, advocating for children, caring for children, maybe these are just things that we as a congregation have always done.

Now let me say, usually when we hear that phrase-“Well, it has just been something we have always done here at church”, usually when we hear that phrase, it is in a negative context, sort of like, we are saying we have no good reason for doing what we were doing except that we have always done it.

But that’s not the case this time. I want everyone to hear that the fact that somehow some way Midway Christian Church has always seemed to have a celebration or observation of Children’s Sabbath is a good thing. No negative context here.

It is a good thing that no one had to point out to this church the reason why children are important. It is a good thing that no one has had to argue for children to be recognized as having a voice in the church. It is a good thing that no one has had to state the obvious that by being advocates for the children and youth in our church and in our community, what we are really doing is working to help bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth. It is a good thing that this church loves and appreciates the gifts and talents of our youth and children.

I want everyone to hear me say that...these are all good things but I’ll be honest, what really struck me this week, beyond the many years this church has been celebrating Children’s Sabbath was the question of why on earth do we even

need to have a Children's Sabbath Observation in the first place? If we love and appreciate our youth and children, what's the point?

That's when it hit me. Not everyone feels the same way. Not everyone advocates for children. Not everyone sees that all are precious in God's sight. I'll let that sink in for a moment.

Think about it: What are some of the first programs cut in budget short falls? Head Start programs. School Feeding programs. Grants for quality child care for children in poverty. We have something called Children's Sabbath each year because not everyone understands why advocating for our children is so important. Not everyone understands why letting our children and youth experience a sense of being loved and cherish is an essential piece of being part of the Kingdom of God here on earth. Not everyone understands why we are called to let everyone, everyone, but especially let the children in our community, in our nation, and in our world know that we are all loved and honored by our God more than we could ever imagine.

We have to have this thing each year, We celebrate and observe Children's Sabbath each year because the sad fact is that not everyone has experienced the life-changing, the life-giving news that God would go to the end of the earth just to show that person how much God cares. Not everyone understands or has even

experienced how by just hearing words like, God has redeemed us, by just hearing words like, we are precious in God's sight, by just hearing words like God honors us and loves us, not everyone understands or has even experience the difference just these few little words can make in someone's life.

And because not everyone understands, and because not everyone has experienced the difference these few words can make, we as Midway Christian Church cannot think we have done enough in caring for and showing our appreciation and love for the children in our church, the children in our community, and the children in our nation and world. We cannot stop until everyone, every single child of God understands how precious he or she really is to God. We cannot stop until every single child of God understands how far God will go, how far God has gone to show us all how much God loves us. We cannot stop until every single child of God knows, knows deep down that they are cherished, that they are loved more than they could ever imagine.

I'm sure everyone noticed that I switched things up a bit this week. Today we didn't have our typical children's moment. Yes, I'll fully admit that I am trying to keep everyone on their toes but that's not the main reason for the switch. I realized that I do a lot of talking each Sunday. I mean a lot of talking on Sundays. And Usually my voice is the main voice or sometimes the only voice everyone hears coming from behind the pulpit. I also know what happens when we hear

something over and over again. A little thing we all call selective hearing starts to happen and the rest just becomes background noise. So this week, I wanted to do something a little different. As I looked at the statistics from the Children's Defense Fund, they were and they are startling.

And I'll be honest, I couldn't take the risk that my voice which we hear every Sunday, I couldn't take the risk that my voice in the very moment that calls us all to sit up and take notice, I couldn't risk my voice falling into the trap of selective hearing and simply becoming just background noise, because these numbers are just too startling.

Let's look at them again: 1, 392 babies are born in extreme poverty. 1, 837 children are confirmed abused or neglected. 2, 857 high school students drop out. 16, 244 public school students are suspended. These numbers are not global numbers. These numbers are for right here in the United States. These numbers are happening right here in Woodford County, right here in Midway.

These things are not happening to children and youth in some country half way around the world. They are happening right here right now in our own community.

But this is the one that is most startling to me: 7 children or teens are killed by guns. You see the other numbers are almost too big for me to wrap my mind around but I can visualize 7. Better yet, let's do a little show n tell.

I need seven youth to come stand in front of everyone:

Seven youth and children are killed by guns each day. 7 beautiful funny loving caring youth who have such potential to change the world are killed by guns each and every day.

That's why I wanted our youth to share these numbers with you. We may be able to ignore a voice we hear each and every Sunday. But we cannot ignore the voices of our children. And youth. I wanted us to be reminded that we are told that a little child will lead them. I wanted to make us all hear these statistics that tell the story of the children and youth in our community, the children and youth in our nation who are hurt, who are killed, who are hungry. I wanted us to all hear these statistics that tell the story of the children and youth in our nation, the children and youth in our community who are not allowed, who are not given the chance to reach their God-giving potential. We cannot let these children and youth drift into the background. We cannot let these children and youth just become statics that we ignore.

It is too important. These numbers should hurt our hearts. These numbers should burst our little security bubbles. These numbers should challenge us, not to pat ourselves on the back, but challenge us to keep going until every single child of God is cherished and protected. These numbers should haunt us and call us to action. These numbers should inspire us to make sure that one day soon, we won't have to have a children's Sabbath Celebration, that we won't have to have a Children's Defense fund because all these life-draining, all these life-killing statistics will be at zero. Instead, we can celebrate life. Instead we will be able to celebrate that all the children, all the youth in our community and in our nation are given the chance to reach their God-given potential. And when that happens, we will be one step closer to having the Kingdom of God fully realized here on earth.

People of God, we aren't done yet. Not by a long shot. What we need to realize is that as we talk about our Children's Sabbath celebration, as we talk about advocating for the children in our community, in our nation, in our world, what we need to realize is that we need to keep going. We can't sit back and congratulate ourselves just yet. We need to keep showing that all of God's children are precious in God's sight.

It is not enough that my children know this. It is not enough that your children or your grandchildren know this. It is not enough until all of God's children know this.

You see, the Kingdom of God has never been about us as individuals. The Kingdom of God has always been about the community as a whole. The Kingdom of God has always been about the children of God, red and yellow, black and white, Jesus Loves the Little Children of the World and all are precious in his sight.

The Kingdom of God has been and will always be about all of us recognizing that all are created in God's image. This should mean something to us, especially in the way we interact with each other, in the way we speak to one another, in the way we take care of one another. The Kingdom of God has been and will always be about showing that each and every one of God's own Beloved Children deserves respect and should be seen as someone of worth.

The reality of it is that the Kingdom of God has never been about us. It has always been about the children of God living in peace, living in love, living in grace. It has always been about everyone knowing that all are honored by God, that all are cherished by God, that all are precious in God's sight and loved more than they could ever imagine.

So maybe it is a good thing we don't know when we actually started this annual observation and celebration of Children's Sabbath. We can celebrate that

this just means advocating for children and youth has always been a part of who we are as a community of faith.

But please hear me say, that doesn't mean we are finished. We still have a long way to go. There is so much more to do. And we can't stop until these statistics that rob the children and youth in our community, in our nation, these statistics that rob children of their God given potential, we cannot stop until all these statistics are at zero. We can't stop until love and grace truly become our standard way of relating to one another. We can't stop until all, until every single child of God knows, that they are cherished, that they are loved.

Which simply means We can't stop answering the call to cherish and protect every single child of God because all are precious in God's sight.

May we always communicate, not just with our words but with our actions as well, may we always communicate that we have and we will always hold the belief that all are created in the image of God and that all of God's children are people of worth. Amen.