



Let the Little Children Come to Me

July 18, 2018

Rachel Yates

Lately, children have been on my mind. My grandson made his debut exactly one week ago. At 6 lbs. 4 ozs., Greyson feels tiny, but we're grateful he is healthy. Our daughter and son-in-law have natural gifts and confidence for parenting, and they're filled with love for this new family addition.

Grandbabies are on the way or have just arrived for several of our pastors. We quipped that there "must be something in the water." Others report they have recently baptized babies.

So, these are obvious reasons that I'm thinking about children, but not the only reasons. Not all the news is so joyful. A colleague posted on Facebook the exciting announcement of an infant adoption. It was coupled with a reminder of the multiple miscarriages and stillbirths they had suffered before. I heard a church member offer prayers for a family that lost two children in just two weeks. In emails, I learned one of my younger family members was reported missing. Though he has since been found, his mother was hysterical during that two-day separation. It brings to mind images of children from our border, forcefully separated from their frantic parents, waiting months for even the possibility of reunification. A colleague shared her pain at the death of two young children from her congregation. Across the globe, human traffickers were stopped in their efforts to capture 26 young Indian girls, due to the attentiveness of someone traveling on the same train.

In these moments, I'm aware of the extremes of joy and sorrow related to children. I can't dismiss the painful extreme with platitudes, like "all things happen for a reason." As much as I believe God can bring good to every situation, I also believe that sometimes horrible things happen for no reason at all, and people suffer. In particular, little children suffer because they can't comprehend the fragility of our world or politics or human cruelty. What we can attempt to rationalize in our suffering makes no sense to children who await only love.

As a parent – and now, a grandparent – I am helpless to insulate my children from all the harm they will face. So, I understand at a deep level the desire of the people who brought their children to Jesus, that he might pray a blessing on them or touch them with his hands of healing. (Matt. 19:14; Mark 10:14, Luke 18:26). While many followers sought healing for themselves, others brought their children. They hoped Jesus could do what they could not.

We take these same steps in our baptism of infants and small children, marking God's gracious movement toward human beings.

Little one, for you Jesus Christ came into the world:
for you he lived and showed God's love;
for you he suffered the darkness of Calvary

and cried at the last, "It is accomplished";
for you he triumphed over death and rose in newness of life;
for you he ascended to reign at God's right hand.

All this he did for you, little one,
though you do not know it yet.

And so the word of Scripture is fulfilled:
"We love because God loved us first."

(Book of Common Order, Church of Scotland)

Baptism is not a magic spell that protects our children from all suffering. It does, however, surround them with the love of a Parent, in a form so deep and holy that we can scarcely imagine it, and the love of the Church as it promises to nurture the child in Christian faith. In life and death, we hand our children to Jesus, entrusting to God those whom we love dearly. It is the greatest safekeeping we can offer them.