

In Nomine Iesu

Christian Education Sunday (Parkland), Trinity 2017 Rites of Passage - Luke 18:15-17

“Now they were bringing even infants to Him that He might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him, saying, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

You’ve heard the term “rite of passage.” One source gives this meaning: “A rite of passage is a ceremony of the passage which occurs when an individual leaves one group to enter another. It involves a significant change of status in society.” The term was first used by a Dutch anthropologist, Arnold van Gennep, in 1909, and it has a specific meaning in anthropology. But the phrase has since then come to refer to any significant event in life that leads to a change in one’s life.

I

For a young man a rite of passage might be his first professional level employment. For a young woman a rite of passage might be the same or might be the delivery of her first child. For a young couple a rite of passage is marriage. For an adolescent a rite of passage might be graduation from eighth grade, such as we have each year here at Parkland. Each case involves a significant change of status and with it public recognition of that change by others.

Some of us here today have – shall we say politely – undergone a few more rites of passage than others, certainly more than the PLS students who will be singing here in a little while. So, let us consider some rites of passage every generation must go through, together with all that precedes those rites.

For students graduation comes only after a long series of homework assignments, tests, and written essays. For a woman the birth of a child comes only after months anticipation, preparation, careful eating and drinking, and maybe a few classes in delivery and birth with the soon-to-be-father. For a man that new job came as a result of training, hard work, and preparation.

A student faces a moment of truth with the first glance at each test, and he or she usually knows right away whether they have prepared adequately. A woman faces a moment of truth when the first pang of labor pain hits her, and she knows there is no turning back. A man faces a moment of truth when he goes in for that first job interview to find out whether it will go well or eliminate him from consideration.

A large part of what we do at Parkland Lutheran School is to help our students lay a foundation for life that will prepare them for the many rites of passage they must face. Here today are many members of Parkland Lutheran Church who support the school and many former students, alumni, of Parkland Lutheran School who have

gone through all of the rites of passage I just mentioned. Some of you, who have already gone through those rites of passage, now await another, the passage from employment to retirement, wondering whether you have saved enough, prepared enough, because the moment of truth is soon upon you. Others of you have already made that passage, and now know whether you did it well or not so well.

These rites of passage are all important considerations, important things to prepare for. And all of them affect many other people than just you. Children rely on their parents, whether they fully realize it or not. Parents rely on their children to study, learn responsibility, and grow in all ways. Both children and parents rely on their neighbors, whether classmates, other school parents, teachers, pastors, and a whole host of people in the community whose lives are intertwined with ours through our various callings in life. As we depend on each other, we also realize that not one of us is perfect, not one of us does all things well or even mostly well. That is a part of the education at Parkland Lutheran School also. It is important thing know that we live in an imperfect and fallen world, a world that cannot give us certain things that we desperately need. Only One can do that ... the One who was perfect in all things. The One who did all things well.

II

In the text before us today people were bringing young children to Jesus so “that he might touch them.” (v. 15) Why did such parents come to Jesus? Well, the **simple** answer is just what the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students wrote in their Bible History books this very week in answer to the question of what Peter told Cornelius about Jesus: that He “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” (Acts 10:38) Did all the parents who brought their children to Jesus know that he was the Christ, the chosen Savior of the world? No, probably not. But they did know he was “doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.” They knew there was something divine, something both godly and godlike about him. They wanted that something for their children. Why then did Jesus’ disciples rebuke these parents? Did they see little point in bringing children to Jesus? Apparently.

To the surprise of the disciples, Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” (v. 16) Now you are probably wondering how the disciples got this so wrong. Well, here there is also a **simple** answer. It is this: We all live in the world, in the kingdom of the world, in the kingdom of God’s left hand. Here we do not see how He works His will with His left hand. Oh, we might often think we do, but, dear friends, we don’t. In this kingdom God’s ways are mysterious and beyond our understanding. Here we see only what we do, how we prepare for the things we understand, how we prepare for the rites of passage we know we must go through in life. And – again! – do not misunderstand me, these things are important, very important, both for us and for our neighbors. And God does indeed work through us to accomplish His will. But we do not always understand the how and the why of His ways! We do not always understand how He can turn our words and deeds, even our often wrong words and deeds to the good of those who are His by faith. We only know and trust that He does indeed bless our feeble works and crown them with good **in His good time**.

And here is the point, we know quite a bit about the world we live in. We know a lot about what brings success and what brings failure. That is one of the reasons we want to provide our children with the tools they need to bring them success. It is why we spend much time, treasure, and effort to educate them. But, dear friends, we would not know anything about this kingdom of God's right hand, the kingdom of His grace, unless He enlightens us. Jesus' disciples were no different than we! Everything they knew about God, His mercy, His love for sinful man, came not from within themselves, from their hearts. No, it came from God! And now, in their day, it was coming from Him whom God, who so loved the world, sent into this dark and confusing world, to be the Way, the Truth, and the Light for us all.

In this dark and confusing world we will always be children, no matter how many rites of passage we have successfully passed through. We will always be children, no matter how accomplished, wealthy or renowned we may become. We will always be children who need our Father in heaven to hear our pleas for help. We will always be children who need Him whom our Father sent to be our Savior, Lord, Brother, and Friend. We will always be children who think we know more than we do, who think we are better and more deserving than we are. We will always need His forgiveness, His love – over and over again – for dear friends, when do we ever tire of being told we are loved, we are forgiven!

So, we children always need to be touched by Jesus, to know the power of His baptism, wherein he claimed us as His own and covered us with His righteousness. We always need to be touched by Jesus, to hear the words of those He has called to pronounce His forgiveness to us. We always need to be touched by Jesus, to be fed with His body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. These are the rites of passage into the kingdom of God. Dear friends, we will always need Jesus, even when others rebuke us and tell us leave Jesus alone, to not burden Him with our troubles, our tears, our fears, our doubts. We children – of whatever age - will always need Jesus, even if we do not fully realize it, and especially if we forget. We need the touch of Him who came into the world to redeem us.

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“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” (v. 17) Children believe, especially young children, “infants,” as St. Luke here wrote. Yes, it is true that sometimes children believe things that are not true. That is why they need parents who love and care for them, who watch out for them. That is why they need teachers, who teach them good, wholesome, and true things, things they will need throughout their lives. That is why their parents and teachers must work together for their good. But, dear parents, members, and friends of Parkland, never forget that we are all children before our Father who art in heaven, whether we realize it or not. His rule over us - His kingdom - is what we need. It is gentle and kind, even when we do not see it as such. His kingdom is for our good, for our eternal good. His Son lived and suffered, died and rose again, to open the kingdom of God to us. He instituted the divine rites of passage, the word and sacraments, to reach out to us, to touch us, to forgive us, and, best of all, draw us to Himself forever. Dear children, one and all, believe this. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria