**Howick Presbyterian Church Service of Worship**

**Sunday 23rd August, 2020 @ Home**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

God of hope and new life. Even now you are calling us to worship.

***To sit at your feet and learn from you. To pray to you. To be empowered by you.***

Even as we are in our own homes, you continue to unite us.

***As we read, watch, sing, pray, and laugh may we have a sense that we are connected to you and to your family.***

Let us worship God!

**SONG: O praise the name of the Lord our God**

I cast my mind to Calvary
Where Jesus bled and died for me.
I see His wounds, His hands, His feet.
My Saviour on that cursed tree

His body bound and drenched in tears
They laid Him down in Joseph's tomb.
The entrance sealed by heavy stone
Messiah still and all alone

***O praise the name of the Lord our God
O praise His name forever more
For endless days we will sing Your praise
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God***

Then on the third at break of dawn,
The Son of heaven rose again.
O trampled death where is your sting?
The angels roar for Christ the King

He shall return in robes of white,
The blazing Son shall pierce the night.
And I will rise among the saints,
My gaze transfixed on Jesus' face

**OPENING PRAYER**

We give you thanks God our Father,
For mercy that reaches out,
For patience that waits our return,
For love that is always ready
To welcome us and bring us home.
You are faithful, and you are kind.
Today, we join together with each other,
To declare your praise
And to worship you, and you alone.
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together

***Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.***

**NOTICES**

*Dear Church family*

*It is with deep sadness that I advise that Alasdair MacLean passed away yesterday. He was a well respected and dearly loved retired teacher of Howick College and elder emeritus of our church. Please keep his lovely wife Rosemary and their daughter Kirsty and son Lachlan in your prayers as they mourn his passing after a long illness.*

*May God hold them all in His loving hands.*

*Blessings*

*Jane*

**KIDS TIME AND BIRTHDAYS/ANNIVERSARIES**

Happy birthday and anniversary for those people celebrating this week.

Hello to any boys and girls who are reading, listening to or watching this!

**KIDS PRAYER**

Lord God, you are always with me.

You are with me in the day and in the night.

You are with me when I’m happy and when I’m sad.

You are with me when I’m healthy and when I am ill.

You are with me when I am peaceful and when I am worried.

Today I am feeling (name how you are feeling) because (reasons you are feeling this way).

Help me to remember that you love me and are with me in everything today.

Amen.

**What do we say each week? “God loves us and we are special!”**

**SONG: How Great is our God.**

The splendour of a King, clothed in majesty
Let all the Earth rejoice
All the Earth rejoice

He wraps himself in light
And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice
Trembles at His voice

***How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God***

Age to age He stands
And time is in His hands
Beginning and the end

The Godhead Three in One
Father Spirit Son
The Lion and the Lamb
The Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names
Worthy of our praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God

**READINGS**

*People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.  Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*

*Mark 10:13-16*

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.  And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*

*Matthew 18:1-6*

**SERMON – “Faith like a child”**

When was the last time you heard a child pray?

Here’s a few I found online:

*Dear God, I went to this wedding and they kissed right in the church; is that okay?*

*Dear God, Thank you for the baby brother, but what I asked for was a puppy*

*Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it,*

*Dear God, if you watch in church on Sunday I will show you my new shoes*

*Dear God, if you give me a genie lamp like Aladdin, I will give you anything you want, except my money or my chess set.*

*Dear God, please send Dennis Clark to a different camp this year*

*Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don’t you just keep the ones you got now?*

*Dear God, I do not think anybody could be a better God. Well I just want you to know but I am not just saying that because you’re God.*

*Dear God, I think about you sometimes even when I’m not praying.*

They cover a wide range of theological idea’s and human experiences. – Anxiety, fear, delight, thankfulness, questions of life, words of adoration, words of frustration.

They are relational

They are short

They don’t rely on getting the words right. The kids know/believe that these words are enough.

They are honest

There is a lot we can learn from children about prayer.

And there is a lot we can learn from children about faith, though this seems counter intuitive, as we adults are meant to be the ones who nurture and teach them.

Jesus says to us, unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

What might this mean for us today?

**TODAYS PASSAGE**

In today’s passage, we read that people are bringing their children to Jesus to place his hands on them and bless them.

Now this was not unusual. Jewish parents would often bring their children to the great local Rabbi’s to have them bless their children. Here Jesus is taking part in this great tradition, not only as a Rabbi, but for many as the long awaited Messiah who would rescue the Jews from the Romans.

So why would the disciples rebuke the parents and children then? We often think, “boo, mean disciples – party poopers!”

However, it was most likely that they were trying to guard Jesus, as they felt was under considerable stress. He was in the final stage of his mission in Jerusalem, where he was a wanted man, and he had spoken of his death. This was a tense time.

They probably felt Jesus didn’t want to be bothered at such a time, yet for Jesus, these little ones were incredibly important to him, and he rebukes his disciples actions.

It’s almost as if in the deep intensity he was feeling as his arrest and death drew closer, these children were a welcome respite, and a reminder of the beauty of humanity, in the midst of the brokenness of humanity.

He affirms, welcomes, honours and blesses them. Jesus is saying children matter. My time and attention is for them too, as it is people of all ages, races and gender.

But not only does he welcome, honour, affirm their place in Gods kingdom and bless them; he makes this remarkable statement:

*“Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*

What does Jesus mean by this?

Does it mean we need to somehow revert back to the type of faith we had when we were kids?

Can you remember what your faith was like when you were a child? And how it changed as you grew?

**Childlike faith vs Childish faith**

Now an important thing to note here is that there is a difference between a child-like faith and a childish faith.

*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.* **1 Cor 13:11-12**

There is a difference between a child like faith, and a naive faith.

There are some adults today who believe that God will give them the winning lotto numbers if they ask. There are some that believe that the Aids epidemic (or Covid 19) is Gods punishment on people. There are adults who behave like spoiled, petulant children in churches today, and will throw a tantrum if things aren’t done their way.

Folks, this is not a child like faith. This is a childish faith. And Christians in this place, have to grow up.

Even as adults we are still capable of behaving immaturely and selfishly. We take these things with us from childhood.

In this sense our childhood never leaves us. We remain capable of very childish bad behaviour.

But there are also the positive, profound qualities, attributes and perspectives we had in our childhood. It is these qualities that I believe Jesus is asking us to carry with us through into adulthood.

Because as we grow, and experience the world, and get hurt – we can get cynical. Our hearts can become hardened. We become too serious and grumpy. We over worry about things. We focus a lot on work and money.

Yes, we have different responsibilities as adults in life, but we also need to rediscover the some of perspectives and attributes we had when you were young. For we will need to use them if we are to follow Jesus into the life of the Kingdom.

**WHAT ARE THE CHILD LIKE QUALITIES JESUS MAY BE REFERRING TO?**

Here are 8 ideas.

1. **A SENSE OF DEPENDENCY**

The journey of life begins with being born and entering into childhood and we are dependent on our parents or caregivers.

The same concept is used to describe the transformation that happens when we follow Jesus.

The change is so dramatic, so significant, like starting over – it can best be described as being born again.

We begin again, placing our trust and dependence on God as our Father, to be raised as children of God.

In the words of the apostle Peter, we are like new born infants, longing for the pure spiritual milk, that by it we may grow up into salvation.

And so a child like faith begins by recognizing that we are children of God, **dependant** on God for life and new life, for nurture and meaning, for a place to call home, to know that we are loved, that we are sacred, that we are blessed. This is something we need our whole lives – to belong to our Fathers house. This is one way in which we carry childhood with us our whole lives. We know we can’t depend on our possessions, our wealth, our skills and abilities, or our earthly titles. These things can never save us, nor provide us with true meaning. Only our Father in heaven can.

Children aren't responsible, their parents are. So a childlike faith is one that is held inside the stronger, larger faith of someone who watches over us.

1. **THE ABILITY TO TAKE JOY AND DELIGHT IN THE LITTLE THINGS**

The ability to celebrate, and find joy.

“Dad, look at this snail!!”

There is so much to be amazed by that we easily take for granted every day. Oh yeah, another sunset, another shooting star, another windswept beach, peaceful meadow, rugged mountain top.

There is so much we need to remember to take delight in.

There is the joy of going to a birthday party. Kids love to celebrate.

As people of faith, we have a lot to celebrate. Our parties should be the best, and we should be as pumped to be at them as our kids.

1. **A DESIRE TO PLAY – TO HAVE FUN.**

Often as adults we get very good at work, sleep, eating, fulfilling our responsibilities, but we often forget how to play.

We were created not only to work, to be stewards of creation, to go forth and multiply, to be in relationship with each other and God, but to enjoy all these things – this world that God made and said “this is good!”

Some of us need to learn how to play again, for this part of childhood is something that is never meant to leave us.

So whether it be your love for playing checkers, chess, 500, Settlers of Catan, etc.

Whether it be dusting off the golf clubs and booking a tee off time on Saturday morning.

Whether it means sitting down with your kids and playing lego with them, and rediscovering the joy of creating something. Do it!

For me it was playing cricket again. I needed something in my life like that. It did wonders for my well being.

God gives you gifts, including the ability to play and enjoy and careless abandon the good things he has given you.

So go and play. And know that God delights in your joy. Even if you miss that 5 foot putt.

1. **OPENNESS**

Kids can be so open. To see the good in people, to trying things, to praying for things.

In adulthood our hearts are often hardened. Some of that hardening is understandable. By this stage in life we know what it is to be let down, hurt, abused, to have trust broken, to know some of the brokenness of people. We have our guards up – and sometime we need them.

But sometimes there is a hardening of heart that happens that shuts us off from seeing or feeling any good in the world or the people around us. We become closed. Maybe we have had prayers unanswered when we desperately needed someone healed. Maybe we don’t bother with prayer anymore because of this.

It is then we need to be reminded that there is still good to celebrated, there are still people to be loved and cared for, there is still love to be shared, especially in most needy of circumstances.

There are beautiful people out there who need to be loved, and if our hearts are hardened and closed, then they miss out and we miss out.

A willingness to pray – when adults are often too cynical to.

To not be cynical.

We need to be open again, despite our scars and betrayals, to the possibilities s God puts in front of us.

1. **COURAGE**

Kids tend to have a lot more courage than adults. To try things.

Yes, kids experience fear – but they can also display a great courage and willingness to try things.

Again, we carry with us scars from times we tried something and it failed.

But with our kids, we encourage them when they fall off their bikes to have another go.

What things are we as adults missing out on because of fear?

Fear can be crippling.

Some people have a fear of deep water, because their swimming is not strong and so they live their lives anxious around the water. But others say, I will not live in fear, I will get swimming lessons.

And in doing so gain an incredible sense of freedom.

Faith requires courage, and fear can stop us going down a road God might be nudging us down.

And though some of my courage as a child led to wipe outs, courage in itself is something we need, for it gives us power over our fears.

1. **Honesty - KNOWING THAT ANY QUESTION IS OKAY**

As we see in the prayers of children, they are comfortable asking any question.

There is an honesty that children have that is powerful.

1. **A WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE**

Often kids are far more quick to forgive than we are. I snapped at my one of my kids the other day, and then had to pluck up the humility to go apologise sincerely for it.

It’s good to model saying to sorry to our kids. Too often we’re the one demanding they say sorry when they do something wrong, but we don’t apply it to ourselves.

In this case when I said sorry, my child put their arms around me and said, it’s okay Dad.

We can learn a lot from children.

1. **TRUSTFUL SUBMISSION TO GODS LEADING IN YOUR LIFE**

Children have a trust in those that care for them – that they know where they are going, where they are being led. Though they may ask questions like, are we there yet, they don’t tend to ask, “where the heck are we going dad?” Turn back!

They put their trust in the one who leads them.

As it has been said: *“This is about a readiness to journey into the untried and the untested (with that deep elemental and ultimate trust which seems inexhaustible in its endurance; the trust which the sceptics and those who have made a shipwreck of their lives bitterly describe as ‘naïve’)”*

And so to have faith is to trust in this God that promises to lead us.

Even though I can’t work out or understand all of the mighty ways of God, I believe that I can put my trust in Him.

For me working it all out is not a priority. Living it out is. I have accepted that much is the mystery of God, and I don’t need to work it all out. I just need to trust it, live it, and enjoy it.

And for me this is what a childlike faith in the midst of adulthood is.

I love this quote from Karl Rahner, because I think it beautifully sums up what it means to have a later stage faith, yet maintain a childlike quality.

*Provided we reverently and lovingly preserve this state of being delivered over to the mystery, life becomes for us a state in which our original childhood is preserved for ever; a state in which we are open to expect the unexpected, to commit ourselves to the incalculable, a state which endows us with the power still to be able to play, to recognize that the powers presiding over our existence are greater than our own designs, and to submit to their control as our deepest good. - Karl Rahner*

So may you be blessed with a childlike faith.

But also, remember the other key part of the scripture we read today.

And may you come to honour, respect and welcome children the way Jesus did.

May you even dare to see children as your equals – though they still need your nurture, protection, discipline and care, they are not just adults in waiting.

They teach us about life and faith. We need to learn from their example.

Remember that children are as much the church of today as they are the church of tomorrow. Their presence and their contributions must be honoured, as with all generations.

Amen.

**CLOSING HYMN: Just as I am**

Just as I am, without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind,
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down
Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

**BLESSING**

*And now may the Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

**Amen.**