

PRAYER: *Holy and Everliving God, you have named us as your beloved children. Move within our hearts so that we will bend down low enough to see the children in our midst and care for them as part of our family. AMEN¹*

OPENER:

If you are new, or did not attend last week, or do not read any of the church communications, you need to know that in three short weeks on October 14th, we will be celebrating our 140th anniversary with a Eucharist at the “old church”, located less than a mile down the road from here. You need to know that I am very excited about that fact.

Sometimes I get so excited by that fact that I pull out a copy of our Parish History (available in the Narthex for free!) or I take a look at old Vestry Minutes just to get a taste of what Good Shepherd was like back then.

SNIPPET:

Here’s a snippet of Good Shepherd’s past, that deals with a good part of my responsibility here, the youth programs, and also thus relates to the subject of our Gospel today:

Here’s the snippet from the Vestry Minutes of yore. I quote:

“The Rector reported we will have no youth group since there was not sufficient interest evidenced. The problem seems to be that the young people simply do not have (QUOTE) ‘enough time.’ ... (THEREFORE) If the need does not exist that we should not artificially ‘pump it up.’”

What an interesting window into the past. The year of that particular report was 1964 and before I share another snippet from the next year 1965... let’s recall somethings: remember that Church of the Good Shepherd still worshipped in the cozy worship space located up in the road. Suburbanization was just beginning, there were not three large high school triangulating the church. The Church of the Good Shepherd had not yet even been admitted to the Diocese as a full parish.

¹ Barbara K. Lundblad

You get the sense from reading the Vestry Minutes that the Congregation, although it had existed for almost a century, had their hands full. They saw the astonishing growth coming in the area but, throughout the 1960s, they were consumed by familiar arguments that consume all church leaders and vestries: building maintenance, increasing the pledge base, and the all-important topic of purchasing a new plot of land, and a new building, that, of course, would soon take place, the building that we worship in this morning.

So all of that was swirling around, those were the arguments that were going on as the Vestry issued that depressing report on the status of the youth group, 1964.

GOSPEL:

In our gospel reading, the disciples were having a different argument, much less flattering. They were arguing about who would be the greatest, who would be in Jesus' Cabinet when Jesus presided in heaven, who would be Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, etc. Jesus wasn't having any of it. He raises a child in his midst and says: "Whoever welcomes on such child in my name, welcomes me."

A couple of important clarifications of time and place: In the ancient world, Children did not have the innate value attached to them that they do in our modern context. So Jesus is not elevating children because he sees them as innocent, or angelic, or cute, but rather because they are vulnerable, disadvantaged, and dispossessed. Recall that most of the instances of children in the gospels are when they are diseased, bleeding, disabled. Recall the famous words of Paul: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child." Not exactly an endorsement of children's viewpoint. So Jesus is not talking about the inherent value of the child, but the inherent value of every one, including and especially children.

What a lesson and a countercultural way of looking at the world, for the disciples and for us.

RETURN:

Back to our vestry minutes. Without trying to pass casual judgement upon the work done here from the safety of the present, I detect in that description: "the youth simply didn't have 'enough time'" a note of blanket criticism, that there was something

innately wrong with that generation. Some of you were indeed young people at that time and maybe you remember such a sweeping judgement landing on you and your peers. What were you doing? What was distracting you from coming to church? How did you get out of it?

What was it like then to be critiqued and judged solely for being located in a chronological age cohort?

Every decade or so, *TIME* magazine publishes a cover with an article declaring that *this* generation of young people represents an anomaly, an aberration, a threat to the order. Technology is the usual culprit, ironic because it promises to solve every other problem, that has caused this and every previous generation to go astray. So *TIME* magazine did so with the Baby Boomers, with Generation X, Gen Y, Z, and has done so with frightful frequency with Millennials.²

I detect in those vestry minutes, a similar type of sweeping judgement, I also sometimes detect in our culture, and closer to home, a similar judgement applied to our youth today.

It's a wrong estimation. The youth of this generation are great. The youth of that generation were great. *The Who* song released their famous song in 1965: "The kids are all right." They were right then, and they are right now.

The youth in this parish are fantastic. Every single one of them.

It's my job to say that, for sure, but I have seen it with my own eyes.

These are all important reminders as we think about our birthday, our 140th celebration.

1965:

In 1965, one year after the pessimistic take on the Youth Group at Good Shepherd, a spaghetti dinner was held for the youth, November 21, 1965, 30 young persons showed up. I have no idea why, what changed, in that year. They probably just had a dinner and people came to it.

The vestry minutes go on to report that both a junior and senior youth group were functioning well without about 12 youth in each. Here some highlights from that year:

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/05/me-generation-time/315151/>

apparently, a South African Episcopal minister visited and talked with the group, after which the Youth desired to have a bake sale to benefit his congregation in South Africa. During this time period, the youth group would also receive as visitors an African-American clergy person and, separately, a parishioner who was an FBI agent visited the youth group and talked to them.

I wonder what they talked about in 1965.....

Vestry minutes are, by nature, pretty dry. They don't give up much but I think one conclusion can be made;

"The kids are all right."

The programs do seem fragile and vulnerable, it needs support and constant attention, which seems to be Jesus' point about children as well.

CONCLUSION:

Importantly, Jesus does not talk about all children, or children in general. He does not gesture to the nursery or say we need to find our "inner child." He holds up *one* such child and says "welcome him." Children are not a symbol, they don't represent something in the future. They're right here, right now. You don't need to imagine what they will be when they grow up. Consider them in the flesh and blood.

I am so excited about our 140th Birthday Celebration, so excited about the youth programs that we have going on at Good Shepherd. I am so excited because I feel like we, as a congregation, are attempting to follow that model found in our Gospel. I see it in our adult volunteers, and the support of the vestry, in the energy employed in so many programs areas at Good Shepherd, including those concerning children and youth.

I am reminded by our Gospel today, and by the witness of history, not to be romantic or idealistic about it.³ But simply to be committed, to be constant and attentive and focused. And to remember when, after the Birthday energy fades and maybe when one is disappointed or let down by what is going on in of our programs, that we are raising up not only our children in our midst, but Jesus himself.

AMEN

³ Barbara K. Lundblad. "A Few More Hopeful Fanatics." *Christian Century*. (August 21-28, 1991). 771