

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

1 Samuel 1:9-11, 19-20; 2:1-10
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
October 16, 2016

KIDS' MESSAGE

Kids, have you ever hit your brother, sister, cousin or friend? Are you supposed to be hitting people? When you have hit someone, how have you felt? **Guilty** – I wasn't supposed to do that? **Afraid** – I wonder if I will be punished? **Sad** – I hope they won't quit being my friend?

We can't take back the bad thing that we have done. We can't make the hit go away. But, the bigger worry is that the **bad thing we have done might make other people stop loving us.** When we hurt someone today, it may end up hurting our relationship with them for a long time to come.

It is at times like this, when we have hurt someone and they are feeling badly about us, that we **need to hear about forgiveness.** When we hurt someone, what is the first thing we should do? **"I am so sorry that I hurt you."** And next? **"Will you please forgive me?"** And next? **"I will never do that again."** And when they forgive you? **"Thank you for still loving me."**

When we do something wrong and the person we hurt forgives us, we get a **second chance**, a **fresh start.** We can still be their sister or brother or cousin or friend. And we can **go back to loving and having fun with them** again, because we know that **they still love us.**

Kids, every time people receive **Holy Communion**, it is a **second chance**, a fresh start with **God** and with the **people** in our lives. In Holy Communion, we say we are **sorry for the bad things** that we have done. We say we are **sorry for not doing some of the good things** we could have done. And God says, **"I forgive you. I still love you. Let's start fresh and have some fun together again."**

Two thousand years ago, **Jesus/God died** on the cross to **show us how much God loves us.** Jesus shared his own body and blood to make a **promise** to us that God would never give up on us, would always come to love and care for us, and would keep us as God's children forever. Kids, **how much do your parents love you? God loves you even way more.** Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

In ancient days, God moved mightily to save God's people from slavery in Egypt. God gifted them with a "**Passover Meal**" as a means of their rescue. **Lamb's blood** was shed to save them from slavery. That ancient night, Israelite children ate the first Passover Meal with their parents. In Jesus' day, hundreds of years after the original Passover Seder, children still celebrated the meal with their parents. This meal, through which God rescued God's people from slavery in Egypt, served as a **teaching tool** for adults to share God's saving work with their children. Adults and children participated fully together. They **grew in the faith** as together they ate this God-given meal. Jews still eat the Passover Meal together as families.

It was this ancient Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with his early disciples on **Maundy Thursday**. At that table, Jesus told the disciples that they were **going to fail him**. **Judas** would sell him out for thirty pieces of silver. **Peter** would deny him three times; **nine** of the remaining ten ran off and hid when he most needed them. And later when Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples, **Thomas**, who was absent, doubted Jesus' resurrection. **None of them was worthy** to share the **Passover meal** with Jesus. None of them was worthy to **receive his body and blood**. Yet Jesus shared the Last Supper with all of them. They had **no clue what was going on**. **But Jesus fed them anyway**.

There were **no women** at the table when Jesus shared the Last Supper. Yet, Jesus **came to greet the women first** when he rose from the dead. The women weren't in hiding like the men were. Fifty years ago, we had **no women pastors** in the church. Now half of our seminary students are women. In the middle ages, the Roman Catholic Church **stopped sharing the wine** with the people. The clergy feared the clumsy peasants might spill the blood of Christ. At least with the body of Christ, they could put the bread right into the peasants' mouths. **Vatican II**, in the 1960s restored the sharing of both bread and wine with Roman Catholic people.

I baptized my grandson, **Bjorn Blake Pedersen**, last Sunday at Trinity Lutheran Church in Moorhead. During the service, a **Tiny Tots Choir**, ages 3-4, sang their hearts out with the words, "**I love Jesus**." We baptize infants before they even know who their moms and dads are. But, moms and dads and God know who they are and commit to raising them in the faith. Some denominations only baptize children/people when they reach

the **“age of accountability.”** They believe that we choose God when we are baptized. Lutherans believe **God chooses us** when we are baptized.

In Jesus’ day, children were worth little or nothing. Only the first born male child counted for anything as they could carry the family name and inherit the family land. When parents brought their little children to be blessed by Jesus, his disciples intervened and tried to chase them away. They figured Jesus was **too important to be messing with worthless children.** Jesus saw how they were trying to turn the children away and he responded, **“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; For it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”** And Jesus continues, **“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”** (Mark 10:13-15) Jesus didn’t ask **how much the children knew.** He didn’t say that they had to be a **certain age.** Jesus lifted up little children as being a **model** of the Christian faith and kingdom. Maybe the **simple faith,** the innocent trust of a little child is what God is able to use to bring us into the kingdom. Maybe little children are better prepared to receive Holy Communion than their parents.

In our text for today, written some time after the people of Israel started settling in the Promised Land, **Hannah** is looking for a child. As a matter of fact, she is **desperate for a child.** She has been unable to conceive. We find her pleading with God to give her a male child. **“O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.”**

Before a baby was conceived in her womb, Hannah had **plans for his future as a child of God.** And **God also had plans** for that little baby to be. It turns out that God was needing a great prophet to speak to his people Israel and Hannah’s soon-to-be-expected, little boy, **Samuel,** was who God had in mind. So God moved mightily, Hannah became a mother, Samuel was born and before you know, he became a great instrument of God’s will. Through Hannah’s prayer of thanksgiving, we hear how **God has started to save the world through a not-yet-conceived baby.** The Lord promised through Samuel to lift up the **feeble,** the **barren,** the **poor** and the **needy.** Did you pray for your kids even before they were born? Have you committed your kids safely into God’s gracious and loving arms? **When do kids actually learn** how much God loves them? Do they have to

wait until **fifth grade**? Can that learning start almost in the **womb of a faithful parent**? **Can God's overwhelming love be tasted, even just a little, at an early age**? Can parents and congregation help that to happen? Do we have to protect the Lord, or Holy Communion? God's **gift of grace, free and undeserved**, is bigger than any of us can imagine!

The Lord can bring about impossible things. The Lord has an ear tuned to our lives and needs. **Our little, impossible requests** can open doors for **God to accomplish even far larger things than we are asking**. Pre-conception prayers, birth prayers, baptismal prayers, Milestone prayers – to grow into the Christian faith, to know and love Jesus more and more, prayers for adult kids and grandkids and all of the kids who are a part of First Lutheran, and all of the kids who still need a faith family... We have been **invited by Jesus to partner with the Holy Spirit** in raising loving, trusting, children of God. Our calling as a faith family starts **as soon as they enter the womb of their mother**. Are you praying for the little baby that **Justine and Chancy Nordick** are bringing into this world?

Lutherans believe that God comes to us through **Word and Sacraments**. We believe that God literally speaks to us through the reading, teaching and preaching of God's Word, Jesus. Lutherans believe that it is literally **Jesus who adopts us** into God's family and who **feeds us** again and again at God's table of love, grace, mercy and forgiveness. Luther spoke of pastors as being "**a mere stick of a preacher waiting on tables**" when we baptize and when we serve Holy Communion. **God does all of the saving work in our world** and **we respond as best we can** in our everyday lives. And hopefully, throughout our lives, **faith grows**.

Do **fifth graders** fully understand what God is doing in Holy Communion? I don't think so. We've been serving communion to fifth graders in the Lutheran church for over 35 years now. **Back then, there were a lot of people who were nervous** about letting fifth graders have communion. When I was a child, you had to be confirmed to receive Holy Communion. Do **sophomores**, confirmed in the faith, fully understand what God is doing through Holy Communion? I don't think so. Do their **parents** understand fully? I doubt it. Many adults, after attending my sophomore confirmation retreat with their young person, say that they never realized how important and powerful Holy Communion is. I have had **four years of theological training** and have served for 37 years as a pastor, yet I do not fully comprehend all that God is doing in Holy Communion. You mean to say

that the **Creator of all that is**, has taken on **human flesh**, become one of us, and then **we killed him**? You mean to say that this **human/God died, rose again, came back** and said, **"I still love you. I forgive you. You are mine?"** **We**, along with our ancient ancestors, **killed God and yet God still loves us**? God's gift of love and grace in **Holy Communion is way beyond what humans could understand. Yet God feeds us anyway.**

One of the most frequent comments about communion that I hear from you is, **"Pastor, I am so glad that we practice open communion so that everybody is welcome. I feel so badly when I go to worship in some churches and they won't let me have communion because I am not a member."** I have had more Roman Catholics come up to me after receiving communion at a wedding and say, **"Pastor, thanks for serving communion. I'm catholic and haven't had communion in years."**

Martin Luther wrote the Small Catechism for adults to **study for themselves**. Then Luther wanted them to **teach the Christian faith to their own children at home**. Luther believed that the body and blood of Jesus are **truly present**, in, with and under the bread and wine. **Calvin**, founder of the Presbyterians, believed that Jesus was **only spiritually present** in communion. Calvin argued, **"Jesus can't be seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven and also be on our altars at the same time."** Luther responded, **"Jesus can do whatever he wants and Jesus promised, "This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you."** Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, United Church of Christ and Reformed Christians have varying views of what exactly happens in Holy Communion, yet we welcome each other to the Lord's Table in our respective churches. Let me summarize:

1. **No one deserves** Holy Communion.
2. **No one totally understands** how God is moving through Holy Communion.
3. **God is totally responsible** for giving life, forgiveness, healing and hope through Holy Communion.
4. Starting with Jesus and the Apostle Paul, **both women and children have been lifted up** in the Christian church.
5. While others thought children weren't worthy of coming into Jesus' presence, he said, **"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; For it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."** And Jesus continued, **"Truly I tell you, whoever does**

- not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.**” (Mark 10:13-15)
6. At baptism, we as a congregation **promise to partner with God and parents** to raise the baptized child in the faith, including sharing the sacraments with them. **If God can move through Holy Baptism** for a little child, then **why can't God also move through Holy Communion** for a little child?
 7. **If we pass early communion**, we will **continue to offer instruction** regarding Holy Communion throughout the children's Sunday school and Confirmation. We will **still have the Passover Seder in fifth grade.** And we will offer **special parent classes to equip them** in **helping their children to grow** in their **understanding of God's love and grace** as it comes to us through **Word and Sacraments.**

Roman Catholics share Holy Communion with second graders. **Orthodox Christians** have been sharing the sacrament of Holy Communion with little children, even babies, for centuries. Our own **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** met in assembly **twenty years ago**, and approved our churches being able to share Holy Communion even with little children if congregation, pastors and parents agreed. I've been thinking and praying about doing this for twenty years. Many people have asked if we can't start sharing communion with children. **Today** I am encouraging our congregation to **open the Lord's Table even to little children. This isn't about me.** I will continue to advocate for children and families no matter which way our vote comes out. So will God. **Sharing Holy Communion with little children** is **about us bringing the little ones and their families to Jesus in every way that we can.** I **trust the Holy Spirit to guide us in our decision.** **May God's will be done.**
Thanks be to God. And thanks for your prayerful consideration. Amen.