



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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AUGUST 7, 2016  
THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Children Were There  
Matthew 15:29-38; Hebrews 11:1-16

The feeding stories are always favorites. Jesus blesses a small amount of food and miraculously a huge crowd is fed. Only a chapter before, Matthew tells us that Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed more than five thousand people. In Chapter Fifteen, a similar event occurs, only this time Jesus has seven loaves and a few fish, and feeds over four thousand people. That last group must have been really hungry because at the first picnic, over five thousand people were fed with twelve baskets of food left over while at the second picnic, the number was over four thousand, with only seven baskets of food collected. However it happened and how much was eaten, it was a miraculous event and we like to hear about even today.

Matthew is consistent with one detail, however. As he concludes both stories, he tells us how many men were fed (five thousand first, then four thousand) and adds, "besides the women and children." My guess is that the women and children would at least double, and perhaps triple, the total number of people who ate together. Yet, today I am not really interested in the numbers or the miracle, although those items are key to the story. What I am interested in is what Matthew tells us, almost as an afterthought: children were there.

Of course children were there. Why wouldn't they be? They were with their parents, and their parents were interested in what Jesus had to say, so they took the kids along. But we know that children were never excess baggage to Jesus. He considered children to be special. In fact, he used a child as the model for faith. I have always thought that Jesus must have been like the favorite uncle who shows up from time to time, always has a surprise for the children, plays with them, makes over them, and treats them as special. I am not surprised that the children were there. It may well be the case that the children wanted to go see Jesus and dragged their parents along. How often has that happened?!

If we pay attention, we will realize that children are always a part of the story of God and his people. The first couple, freshly ousted from the Garden, soon had children. While that story did not go well, at least not for Abel, it

teaches a lot about human nature and God's nature. The "big story" in the Old Testament, is the story of God beginning a nation of people who will serve him and spread the word about him. Who is at the center of the story? A child. Isaac becomes the child of promise. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that even though all the odds seemed stacked against it, Abraham never gave up believing that God would fulfill his promise and provide him and Sarah with a son.

When all did not go well for God's people, a child often played into the scene somehow. As a child, Moses was rescued by the Pharaoh's daughter and grew up to be the one who led his people to freedom. Samuel was a child who served the priest in the temple before God chose him to be a great prophet to guide his people. A skilled poet, musician, and king, David first appears in scripture as a child who fears neither beast nor man and conquers the Philistine Goliath.

Over and over throughout scripture, children are there. Sometimes children are the key players in a story. Sometimes the children are in the background, but they are always there.

Our children are important. The very fact that we hold a covenant ceremony to bless our children points to that fact. We have been privileged today to hear two of our children sing today. At many points throughout the Christian year, our children lead us in worship with songs, readings, and prayers. Every time we gather, our children are here, and that means a lot to us.

The stories of Jesus feeding the great crowds remind me of two things. First, our children ought to be an integral part of everything we do as a congregation. When we worship, they should be there. When we fellowship together, they should be there. When we embark on a missions activity, they ought to be there. When we pray together, learn together, and serve together, our children ought to be there. They have much to offer to all of our activities. They have a lot to teach us about ministry. And we have a great deal to teach them about living our faith.

The other thing that these stories point out to me is that our children ought to be there. I know that sounds like exactly what I said was the first thing I gather from these stories. What I mean is, it is our responsibility to be certain that our children are present. They need to be in Sunday School where they learn about the Bible, its message, and the ways we live out our

faith. They need to be in worship where they learn how to honor and glorify God. They need to be involved in ministry, and they need to be included in fellowship activities. Our children need to be here, and we are the ones who have to make certain that they are.

I am well aware of all of the activities children participate in these days. School, sports, enrichment, community, and social activities consume a lot of the valuable time our children have. But we would not allow our children to eat a diet that is completely unhealthy, would we? We would not allow our children to skip school just because they weren't sure they wanted to go? We would not forego seeing a doctor, even for an annual checkup, because we care about our children's health. Why, then, would we neglect our children's spiritual well-being? Why would we forego the one aspect that is surely to shape every other aspect of a child's life moving into the future? Why would we not want our children to be here . . . unless we do not think it is important to be here?

Many of us would likely not be here today if our parents or someone else had not taken us to Sunday School and church. Many of us have good memories of what church meant for us growing up. All of us realize the importance of being in right relationship with God and one another. That is why we are here, isn't it?

All along, throughout the amazing story of God and his people, children were there. Shouldn't they be here as well? Apparently God thinks so!

August 7, 2016

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Supplication

Holy and Gracious God, who came to us as a helpless infant, who welcomed and blessed little ones, and who loves and nurtures us as our heavenly Parent, you have called us to have a child-like faith and trust in you and to make ourselves vulnerable to life in community with one another, but teach us, we pray, to avoid being simplistic or childish in the ways we live out our faith in this world. You have given us immeasurable blessings and have charged us to be good stewards of those resources, and among the greatest and most precious of these gifts and responsibilities are our children. You have given us their laughter, their love, their trust, and you have asked that we protect and teach them and nurture them. We thank you for the promise of these young lives that motivate and inspire us and give us hope for the future. Forgive us when we fail them and you. Make us truly grateful for these extraordinary blessings and for every good gift which comes from you.

O Lord, as we celebrate the delight and innocence of childhood, we grieve that so many children live with trust that has been violated and little reason to rejoice. Too many children are victims of abuse and violence, drugs and poverty and neglect. Even in our land of opportunity and prosperity, we have yet to achieve a society that protects and nurtures families, that educates our children to prepare them for the future, that promotes peace and dignity for all. We lift up to you, O Lord, those children who, even now, are hurting and forgotten, poor and hungry, lonely and desperate. Help us to meet these needs by being tireless in our work, courageous in our stands, obedient in our service, and faithful in our prayers, that our children might discover their gifts and have the opportunity to fulfill their purposes in your kingdom for generations to come. Make us unwavering in our determination and creative in our vision, not only that we might address the needs in our community and our world, but also that our children might see your image reflected in our lives. As we gather around your table, as we go out from this place, and as we live out our faith each day, may the prayers of our hearts and the praise on our lips be made evident through our lives for the building of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. In the name of Jesus the Christ and by the power of your Holy Spirit we make our prayer. Amen.

Elizabeth Edwards  
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