

Immanuel United Church
October 3rd, 2021

Welcome

Call to Worship:

All are welcome in this place,
all are welcome in God's place.
Young and old, and in between,
short and tall, large and lean.
Those who are lonely, tired, and hurting,
or giggling, smiling, or practically bursting.
**Each as we are, wonderfully made,
we join in God's house together, today.**

Prayer: (inspired by Psalm 104)

We bless you today, O God,
for you are great beyond imagining.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
wrapped in light as a garment, draped in the beautiful deep darkness of space.
Your love wraps the earth, underlying and infusing all that is.
You do not intervene and interrupt the free will you give us,
yet you are always offering the influence and wisdom of your love.
**We bless you today, Holy God, for you are great beyond imagining,
and yet you love and know us, comfort and care for us,
calling us to the Way of Jesus, for the healing of lives and planet.
You, O God, are our higher power, the greatest gift of all. Amen.**

Hymn: MV 1 *Let Us build a House* (All Are Welcome)

Scripture: Mark 10:13-16 (Presented on zoom from the Spark Children's Story Bible)

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Message: Praying with Children

I started my student ministry field placement at a United Church near the Vancouver School of Theology, on the UBC campus. West Point Grey is a very beautiful, very affluent, part of Vancouver. The spiritual insights which West Point Grey United Church members shared with me was also affluent; I will always remember their kind and beautiful minds. I am forever thankful to the church and the minister, Valerie Taylor, who took me under her wing. The church was also near Kits Beach. Pretty homes, restaurants, cafes and shops abound; the whole area is primarily residential, very relaxed and pleasant. My life as an international student/newcomer mom, at that time, meant carrying Peace everywhere I went. On my back, in a stroller, or in my arms. That meant that I only visited the pretty places a few times when someone took me there; I mostly saw them as I passed through Kitsilano using the "99 B Line" bus.

Just remembering and thinking about the bus announcement voice, "99 B Line", evokes so many memories and feelings at once. Not just the city which I travelled through, but my growing, curious, loving child, who was always with me. Peace, when he was 2-3 years old, did not like to go to church with me on Sundays. 'Going to church' meant to him that he would be separated from me soon, as I had to drop him off at the nursery room (with a babysitter for young children) so I could get busy helping, learning, performing my field placement requirements. I tried to make him happy, have fun, satisfy his curiosity until we arrived at the church, and when we entered the church, and the nursery room, I stayed with him a bit, then gave him his favourite candy, and sang a song, The Lord's Prayer hymn I learned from The United Church. VU #, while hugging him. Soon, I noticed that he had memorized the ending word of each line.

At West Point Grey United, I learned what Children's Time was. Also, I learned one more thing. One of the adults shared with me, with smiles and her own reflection, that in Canadian culture, they grew up with the idea, "Children should be seen and not heard." A few others told me the same thing – that their childhood was dominated by, "Children should be seen and not heard." And they added, "Now, we realize this is not good. We're trying to change, to make our worship and lives more inclusive of children."

In Korea, even at church, children are everywhere. They run, they are busy. They are noisy. You hear children a lot. Also, to compensate for that noise and energy (adults need peace in Korea too), children are allowed, or even encouraged, to gather among themselves somewhere apart from where the adults gather. But children frequently come back to their mom or dad to get something. I shared with you before that I really never had any "culture shock", coming from Korea to Vancouver, BC. However, I did observe how children here (White children) were so well disciplined and trained.

Children's Time was a very special moment to make the worship inclusive of children, but after the time when we could hear children's ingenious ideas or cheerful answers, and adults enjoying them sincerely, these children were seen, but not heard!

"Children should be seen and not heard." This phrase still lingers in my mind today. Makes me think. Reflect. Remain in my emotions of being sad, worried, feeling conflicted, and guilty when I dropped off Peace in the nursery room. It was necessary. It was temporary. Peace knew I was nearby. But I never asked how he felt. He was usually alone with the babysitter. He did not understand English at the time.

On May 28th, Tk'emlups First Nation shared that it had located evidence of 215 unmarked and undocumented graves on the grounds of the former Kamloops Residential School. Similar announcements were made by several other First Nations, and there are numerous efforts at identification and recovery being made in others. Given what had been shared by survivors at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this should not have been a surprise, but it continues to reverberate throughout the country, and in the United Church. One of the United Church initiatives following this traumatic discovery is the restating of the church's commitment to help bring the children home. This includes making all records accessible to those Indigenous communities most affected by the institutions we operated, acknowledging the pain and trauma of survivors, families and communities and providing financial assistance if desired. The General Council Executive met to discuss a funding proposal for "Bringing the Children Home". The project, which includes a new round of archival research as well as financial support for Indigenous communities in the areas of knowledge-gathering, searches/identification of sites, ceremony, commemoration, and possible repatriation, was approved with an initial commitment of three million dollars.

This is progress, an evolution in how the United Church thinks about our relationship with First Nation children and communities. Seeing this, I realize that we need to change how we think about children at church.

Traditionally, we run the church along the philosophy that children need education, adults need community, to feel a sense of belonging. However, as we begin to gain more understanding about children and their needs, our values, culture and contexts are changing. We realize we need to relearn about what church can mean to each generation, and be flexible and responsive in what we offer to each generation. Children need to feel like they truly belong. Adults need education. Adults need to transformatively learn.

Today, I hope you can pray with children, children in your heart, in your family, in the following four Bible stories - that teach about children in a different way than other teachings in the Bible like children should obedient to their parents.

Mark 10:13-16

“People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.”

Isaiah 11:86

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

Luke 2:49

Jesus says to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

John 6:9

There is a boy here who has five barely loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?

When we see and hear children in our church, let’s forget the traditional sayings that put children’s needs and voices below those of adults. The Kin_dom belongs to such as these – their faith, their thoughts, will multiply the blessings we receive in this place.

Hymn: MV 133 *Jesus Laughed Out Loud*

Communion:

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift our hearts in prayer.

Let us give thanks to God.

It is good to give God thanks and praise.

**Holy, holy, holy God,
power of life and love!
Heaven and earth are full of your glory!
Hosanna through the ages!
Blest is the One who comes to bring your peace to earth!**

Passing the Peace

The Great Prayer:

Why do we give thanks and pray at this table?
We give thanks because God is always with us.
We pray because that is how we connect with God.
How can we pray?
**We can pray with words and music, in art and dance,
in a hug and a handshake, in silence or out loud.**
Is this prayer special?
It is special!
**This is the time when we give God thanks for all of creation,
for the plants and the animals, the birds and the water.**
What about us?
**Yes, we give God thanks for all the people!
The prophets and preachers, the midwives and judges.**
What about Jesus?
Yes, we give thanks for Jesus!
What did Jesus teach us?
To love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves!
How do we do that?
By sharing what we have with others.
What about this bread?
We share this bread with all who are hungry!
What about the juice?
We share that too!
What's so meaningful about this meal?
Can you tell us?

Telling the story of the last Supper

Let's say the prayer together.

Send, O God, your Holy Spirit upon this bread.

**May the prayers that were kneaded into it be broken open
and spread throughout the world.
May this juice ease all who are thirsty. Amen.**

These, my friends, are the gifts of God, for the people of God.
Come, for all is ready.

Distribution

What do we do now?
**We go about our daily lives,
Knowing that we are living prayers! Amen.**
Now let's pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, ...

Hymn: VU 422 *God Be with You till We Meet Again*

Commissioning and Benediction:

**You have received the good news!
Now go:
Proclaim the good news.
Live the good news.
Be the good news.
God's love is extended to all children of God.
No restrictions. No exceptions! Amen.**