

**Children's Sunday Reflection – How are the children?
Preached at Parkminster UC – November 17, 2019 – Rev. Heather Power
Luke 10:25-37**

Note: some illustrations adapted/inspired by The United Church of Canada's Children's Sunday resource materials.

The Maasai people of Kenya retain much of their traditional ways and cultural heritage. For as long as anyone can remember, their warriors used to greet each other with what translates to "How are the children?" It is the most widely used greeting by the whole community. The traditional response is always "the children are well."¹

Nelson Mandela once said, "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."² The Maasai are not simply asking after the health of the children but also the state of their community. If the children are well, the world is well. "If the children are unwell, the whole world is sick."³

The question people of faith face is this: How are the children? While the children in our own homes might be thriving, our faith requires us to remove what stops us from engaging and consider more honestly at the state of the world around us. The only answer we can truthfully confess is that the children are not well.

In Waterloo Region alone, there are approximately 35% of young people up to age 17 who face food insecurity. Last year, 12,375 children and youth in our community were supported with food assistance. (Source: <https://www.thefoodbank.ca/network/hunger/>)

Approximately 1 in 5 children or youth in Ontario are living with a mental health challenge. (Source: <https://ontario.cmha.ca/mental-health/child-and-youth-mental-health/>)

20% of Indigenous children living in northern communities do not have access to clean drinking water. Housing shortages continue to plague many northern communities leaving children and their families in difficult situations and access to education continues to be a challenge for many Indigenous youth. (Source: <https://truenorthaid.ca/how-to-help-first-nations/>)

The plight of migrant and refugee children in the United States caught the attention of the world – yet still countless children are separated from their parents. The non-profit Immigration Counseling Service (ICS) has used court transcripts to re-create hearings where children as young as three years old have had to represent themselves after crossing into the United States.

¹ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/and-how-are-the-children>

² http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1995/950508_nmcf.htm

³ Rev. Traci Blackmon speaking on child detention, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whotDovIji4>

Sadly, the list goes on. But there is hope – and much of it comes from young people themselves. They are today’s prophets calling us to seek justice for the earth, water, and humanity as a whole. They are voices like Greta Thunberg, Autumn Peltier, Xiye Bastida, and Mari Copeny. They – and other voices are rising – and we hear these cries as a directive to ask ourselves and this community:

What does God call us to do?

This morning, three of our young people are going to share ways they are living their faith and what God is calling them to do. I’d like to invite them to share with us now....

Skye: This past summer I had the opportunity to participate in Wampum-Neechi at Five Oaks retreat centre in Paris, Ontario. This is a project to connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth together to form friendships and learn about Indigenous history and cultural values.

We made a lot of friendships that will last for a very long time. These friendships help foster healthy dialogue, right relations, and a deeper connection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. That experience was so important to me because God calls us to love one another. We must continue to build and honour our relationships with Indigenous people. It is an important part of my faith journey and I am proud that Parkminster is also doing work building right relations.

Gabriel: I will be talking today about the importance of youth group and what it does for the community. Youth group meets Sunday mornings during service, as well as every other Friday night. I have really enjoyed my time with youth group and look forward to it every week. It’s comforting to have a group of friends outside of school. As young people, the community we surround ourselves with is very important for who we will later become.

Sunday mornings we usually spend time catching up on the week, talking about questions of faith, and occasionally helping the younger children with their activities. Friday nights tend to be more social. We play board games, go on outings like to restaurants, ice cream, or the upcoming performance of *Matilda*, and often eat foods that aren’t very good for us. Yes, I am talking about creamy garlic sauce.

As much as I like the social part, it’s also important to me that we help the community. In the past we have bought socks and other supplies for the homeless. More recently, we prepared Hallowe’en treat bags for those who come to the church for grocery cards. We have also helped out with church lunches and other gatherings. Coming up, we will be assisting with White Gift Sunday to support the needs of young people in our community who access One Roof Youth Services.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of youth group at Parkminster, and especially to be able to help those in need. This is what we are called to do. This is what we are ALL called to do.

Shadow: During the summer I went to the Youth Action on Climate Change conference at the University of Waterloo. High school, college and university youth from Guelph, Cambridge, and Kitchener-Waterloo were all invited to take part. At this conference we discussed how youth can and are making a difference for climate justice. We discussed strategies and ideas for being more climate conscious such as buying our food locally and supporting local farms. We also brainstormed ways that our city could support more opportunities for people to walk, bike or take public transit. I also attended a workshop where I learned to make wax wraps from beeswax instead of having to use Styrofoam or plastic.

Small things that can care for the earth can amount to a big difference. We must always ask ourselves, “What does God call us to do?” I believe that God calls us to make better decisions, to work individually and collectively to save the planet. I believe that the voices of young people around the world will lead us in addressing the climate crisis

What does God call us to do?

Jesus calls us to love and care for one another. In our parable this morning, the religious scholar tried to define the limits to who was his neighbour. Surely, we aren’t responsible for all children. When Jesus heard this, he told the scholar the story of the Good Samaritan.

Over the centuries, Christians have puzzled over the motives that drove the priest and Levites to abandon the dying man on the roadside. Perhaps they were running late, scared that it was a trap, too tired from helping so many that day, or too ritually pure to touch blood. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put it, in each of these instances the people were asking, “What will happen to me if I help this person?”⁴

The Samaritan doesn’t ask this. Instead he asks, “What will happen to this person if I do not help?”

What will happen to the children, to the climate, to the world if we too do not help? If we give a modern-day Levite or priestly answer to the plight of our siblings? The situation is complicated, some will say. The children are not in our path but far away. These things are too much for one person; one community to undertake. These are semantics that Jesus would have no time for.

We just have to turn on the television, listen to the radio, or spend time online to see the pain of the world. Young people are challenging us to go beyond words to help make this world a more just place for all. What are they - what is God calling us to do?

Like the Maasai, we are encouraged to remember that the health of our society is rooted in how well the children are doing. We are encouraged to listen to the voices of young people in

⁴ <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/ive-been-mountaintop-address-delivered-bishop-charles-mason-temple>

our midst and around the world who speak often hard truths with love and conviction. As a community of faith we must promise to nurture and encourage their leadership.

As I thought about this Children's Sunday, I was reminded of a line from the musical *Hamilton*:

"Legacy, what is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see."

As a church that is committed to our young people and children around the world, we are helping and living out our faith in ways that we may never see or know. But we are also touching lives in ways that are real and powerful and grace-filled and life changing.

So let us plant seeds; let us celebrate, support, and love our young people.

It is time to live into that promise. Here, now, this day, it is our moment to shine with the love of Christ and care for God's all children. Thanks be to God. Amen.