



The Trinity Pulpit



Believing for the Journey

Children's Day

Rev. Karen Metcalf

February 3, 2008

Our children are “Embracing the Journey” as seekers in sneakers. Now, *sneakers* may not be a word that is widely used these days. As the lead team was preparing for a theme, we looked at several options to promote the church emphasis of “Embracing the Journey.” I suggested this and then asked several children what they called their sport shoes. Many answered by the brand name or by the sport the shoe was used for. I asked if they ever called them sneakers, and they said “not.”

I saw a funny illustration recently which showed a young boy speaking to his mother. Both were standing by what appeared to be their house which was a large, old tattered tennis shoe. (Thus, the old woman in the shoe nursery rhyme.) He looks up at his mom and says, “But mom, all the other kids have houses endorsed by famous athletes!”

Oh well, I may date myself, but isn't it “in” to be “RETRO?” Hopefully the promotion explained our intent. We are seeking God in comfortable and formal ways. So, if our children are at church in sport shoes more than dress shoes, or if they are at school or at a game or just goofing around, they can still seek God—as can we. Our children and all of us are embracing the journey of life. As we do, we need to seek God and the ways of God.

Seeking God involves seeking to be more like God and includes active words like *learning*, *believing*, *accepting*, *growing* and *sharing* with others. Our children are on the brink of all of this. As parents, many of you desire the best of Christian growth and nurturing for your children. You want them to know about God and why God sent Jesus into the world. You hope they will follow Jesus and accept him as their Lord and Savior. You want them to have friends that will influence and support their

growth and fellowship. Many of you may even wish that your children will be bold in their faith and be willing to share Christ with others. These are noble intentions, and the church will work hard to help you in this endeavor. We should desire these same dreams for our own lives as well.

What does Matthew 6:33 involve, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness..?” What does it mean to truly seek God? What does seeking God involve? I believe that seeking out God is expressed through our faith. Seeking God involves knowing God; seeking God involves accepting God's grace; and seeking God involves acting or relating upon this experience.

This is where I want to begin—with the image of our children discovering about believing or faith and learning to lead, getting to know God in a real and personal way. How do we learn about God? Many of you help our children or help youth or adults in this process. You teach Sunday School, Discipleship Training, Missions or Music, and through the teaching, learning and the discovering we begin to form our beliefs.

Our children have responded to some questions I presented to them in Sunday School one Sunday. I want you to hear from them as they define *believe* and *trust*, and take note of some of the things they believe about God.

Foster Lingle:

Hello, my name is Foster Lingle. Let me share with you about the words believe, trust, and faith. They are important words. *Believe* is defined as “to accept as true or real.” *Trust* is defined in the dictionary as “confidence or faith in a person or thing” or

“to believe or to depend on.” *Faith* is “a belief or value, truth or trust worthiness of someone or something; a belief in God.” It is good to have faith and believe in God.

Alyson Burnette:

My name is Alyson Burnette. I believe Jesus died on the cross for me. I believe God makes everything happen. My mom bought me the “Beginners Bible” when I was five years old. That is when I first remember learning about or believing in Jesus.

Emma Keeter:

I am Emma Keeter. *Believe* means that you almost trust it. *Trust* means that you believe in it. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and God has an everlasting life. My favorite Bible story is Noah’s ark because it is dramatic and it is in a movie. I like to learn about God in the Bible.

Christy Witcher:

My name is Christy Witcher. I think that the words *believe* and *trust* mean that someone can tell you something and that you can listen and know that what they are saying is true. I believe that Jesus is the one who died on the cross to save our sins. I believe that God created everything, including me. I also believe that the church is a place to worship God and a church is a group of people that worship God together. I am glad we can worship today.

Jada Coleman:


My name is Jada Coleman. *Believe* and *trust* mean that you need to believe that Jesus is your Savior and trust that he will always be with you. I believe that Jesus died on the cross to save us and we will have everlasting life, and he was the newborn Messiah. I believe that God is very mighty and he will be everlasting. I believe that church is a time where we worship God by singing, preaching and praying. Church is a place to worship and learn about God.

Vance Lassiter:

I am Vance Lassiter. I think to believe or to trust means to rely on someone else to help you. I believe Jesus is the Savior and he died on the cross for our sins. I believe God created everything and he is our Father. It is important to be a believer in God. We need to depend on God to help us and help each other.

Our children are learning about faith. They have beliefs that are very near and dear to them. Did you know that every person is born with a sense of faith? It may not be influenced in a Judeo Christian tradition or even as an organized faith system. But, we are all born with a capacity to trust. James Fowler, while on staff at Harvard University, conducted major research on the theory of faith development. Fowler’s definition of faith, written in the introduction to his book *Stages of Faith*, states: “Faith is a human universal. We are endowed at birth with a beginning capacity for faith. How these

capacities are activated and grow depends to a large extent on how we are welcomed into the world and what kind of environments we grow in. Faith is interactive and social; it requires community, language, ritual, and nurture. Faith is also shaped by an initiative from beyond us and other people, an initiative of spirit or grace. How these are recognized and imaged, perceived or ignored, powerfully affects the shape of faith in our lives.”



“Faith and believing incorporate the processes of knowing, feeling, valuing, understanding, experiencing and interpreting.”

Jesus knew we grow in faith even from a child. He called the children to him. He blessed them and welcomed them. Jesus says in Mark 10:15 “that unless we receive the kingdom of God like a little child we will never enter it.” Jesus valued the simple faith of a child.

Let us look again at this story of Zaccheus in Luke. Zaccheus must have known something about Jesus. He knew enough to want to try to see him and possibly know more. I often wonder when I hear this story, what made a prominent man in his culture hurry to climb up a tree to see someone? And then Jesus came to him—Wow! Did Jesus know Zaccheus had the potential for believing? Was Zaccheus ready to be confronted by Christ?

Faith and believing incorporate the processes of knowing, feeling, valuing, understanding, experiencing, and interpreting. Faith is not necessarily religious, it can be centered on a career, family, success or even oneself.

John Westerhoff of Duke University, another noted author on faith development, echoes John Fowler’s reasoning. He contends that faith and believing is not always taught through usual instruction but must be experienced. What did I

say? We can not teach faith? Well then, why do I have a job? Westerhoff claims that religion can be taught but not faith. I believe this is where we find Zaccheus. He is able to experience Jesus. He encounters him and then is changed by Jesus' presence.

We can teach beliefs, we can teach stories from the Bible, we can teach about God's love and how God sent Jesus. We can believe and know this to be true as our children expressed earlier. However, each person must accept these beliefs as their own, each person must embrace these stories and experience the grace that God offers us through Jesus Christ and make it his or hers. No one can do it for another. Then we truly believe. Then we have faith.

So far we have discussed seeking God through knowing and believing in God. Now we need to embrace, accept and make this faith our own.

To come to a saving knowledge of Christ we must come to terms with ourselves. We must realize that we are sinners separated from God with no way to get to God except by the grace God provides in Jesus. We must be sorry for our sins—sorry for choosing our own way over God's way. We must tell our Lord that we are sorry and confess. We must give up our own way and turn and follow Jesus. We must give our lives to Jesus. We must believe and trust in Jesus as our personal Savior and be willing to live for Jesus all the rest of our lives.

Jesus loves us. Jesus died for us. Jesus wants us to live for him and know God, but we do not need to just know God, we need to accept what God offers us: grace and love. We need to embrace it. It is ours!

The great Swiss-German theologian Karl Barth delivered one of the closing lectures of his life at the University of Chicago Divinity School. At the end of the lecture, the president of the seminary told the audience that Dr. Barth was not well and was very tired. He explained that Dr. Barth would like to be open to questions but that he probably could not handle the strain. Then the president said, "I will ask just one question on behalf of all of us. He turned to Dr. Barth and asked, "Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?"

This was a remarkable question to ask of a man who had written tens of thousands of pages of some of the most sophisticated theology ever put on paper. Can't you just see it—the students sitting with pen in hand and pad ready. They wanted to jot down the premier insight of this great theologian of their time.

Karl Barth closed his eyes and thought for a while. Then he smiled, opened his eyes, and said to the young seminarians, "The greatest theological insight that I have ever heard is this: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!'"

Seeking God involves knowing God. Seeking God also means accepting God and trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior. Seeking God also involves experiencing our faith and sharing it with others. As John Westerhoff notes, faith and believing are of necessity active. Faith is deeply personal and evidenced in behavior. We must experience faith and make it our own. The "teaching" of faith is often better done through persons within the community of faith modeling and sharing their faith. He believes faith must be inspired within a faith community. Westerhoff contends that if faith is to be taught in the community of faith, that community must contain an intergenerational presence. There must be interaction among three generations, each of which represents an era of time. The older generation represents memory whose responsibility it

is to pass on faith. The middle generation symbolizes the present whose responsibility it is to keep reality before the community. The younger generation represents the future, and thus the vision for the community of faith.

Therefore, we all have a responsibility to share. None of us can deter from our responsibility. Let's listen to our children as they share some of their

beliefs, and how and why they think we should share our faith.

Samuel Ward:

My name is Samuel Ward. I believe it is important to believe in God. If you do, God helps you and you will go to heaven. We should share what we believe with others. I like to tell my friends that I believe in Jesus and that Jesus died on the cross. I also tell them they need to go to church. Sometimes they do not like it or do not understand. I just keep trying to talk to them.



*"Seeking God...
involves experiencing
our faith and sharing
it with others."*

Beth Doman:

I am Beth Doman. I agree that it is important to believe in God. Then you will go to heaven. We should tell others so they will go to church and go to heaven. If someone comes to church they will learn about God and maybe accept Jesus as their Lord.

Megan Strickland:

I am Megan Strickland. It is very important to believe in God and Jesus. If you believe, you will go to heaven, and if we share this with others they might go to heaven, too. Wouldn't that be great!

Blake Clausen:

My name is Blake Clausen. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This is what we need to believe, and this is why we need to share our faith with others.

Sarah Melvin:

Hello, I am Sarah Melvin. I like the story of Easter because it is very interesting and tells how God sacrificed his son on earth for us. This is important for each of us to believe. We should also share what we believe with others. It is great to have more believers in God.

Madeline Townsend:

My name is Madeline Townsend. I like the story about God creating the earth. It makes God sound crafty and in charge. It is very important to believe in God because God is everything, and not believing in him is like being in darkness forever. We need to share our beliefs with others because people could become a stronger Christian or become one.

Savannah Milstead:

I am Savannah Milstead. Believing means to have faith in that person or subject. We must believe in God because whoever believes in God shall not perish but have eternal life. We need to share what we believe with others so more people will become Christians and believe in God.

You are so right. We need to share what we believe with others so more people will become Christians and believe in God. Once we encounter Christ and accept him, we must share or tell the good news. We must live it out in the world. Isn't that what Zaccheus did? He encountered Jesus in his home and changed his moral compass and lifestyle. *"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."* Luke 19:8.

Our children are learning about God through Bible stories and beliefs they are taught. They are beginning to accept these truths, embrace them and experience Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They are also acting on this experience and relating to others by sharing their faith in their world and learning to live in a faith community called church. Are we learning from their example? Are we freeing ourselves to believe? Are we the community of faith we need to be in order for continual growth to occur? Do you know God, accept Him and share his love with others? Are you "Believing for the Journey?"

We are free to believe. Believe in the grace and love God offers us through his son Jesus Christ our Lord. We are on a faith journey together. Believing needs to be part of the journey! It is not just our children that need to seek God, know God, accept Christ's forgiveness and experience faith through fellowship and telling others. All of us need to believe. We need to examine our lives and see where we are on this journey. Can you take the challenge of our children to be seekers in sneakers? How about searchers in suede?

Come today—you are invited to come to this Christ who loves you. Make your intentions known. Come and seek God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Choose today to accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Make Trinity your new church home and seek to become an active part of this faith community. Let us know of your commitment to share Christ daily in your life.

We welcome you and we welcome your children.

