

**July 26, 2009**

**John 6:1-21**

## **Overcoming Fear**

**A child saved the day for Jesus.**

**Could it be that our children save the day for us?**

**Is it time for us to sit at the feet of our children?**

I read a story this week about a little girl named Megan. Like many kids her age for generations before her, Megan was terrified of a monster that lived under her bed. What to do?

But unlike any previous generation before her, Megan did something about the monster under her bed.

She sat down at her computer and used a program for children to tell her story about how scary the monster who lived under the bed was, about how she wanted it to go away, and about how she solved her problem -- she put the monster under her brother's bed.

She included in her story pictures of herself, her bed, her brother, her brother's bed and the monster. These were pictures she drew on her computer.

When she was done with her little storybook, she decided to share it with some of her friends on-line.

You see, Megan has friends around the world she communicates with all the time -- friends Megan has never seen. So with the help of her parents, she posted her storybook on-line, where kids from around the globe could read and hear her tell her story.

A multimedia magazine called Nautilus picked up her story and published it. Two of the most respected business consultants in the world, Stan Davis and Jim Botkin, ran across it through a digital butler that was prowling the Internet for items they had programmed it to look for.

When they found it, they couldn't stop watching it. Here is what these business consultants said,

"We watched it five times. Here was a 5-year-old child who had accomplished all the major tasks of moviemaking. She was the star, wrote the screenplay, created the visuals, did the editing, was producer and director, and even did her own distribution. Her learning was integrated into the realities of her life. And to her it was all play."

In fact, Davis and Botkin were so struck by Megan's story that they titled their text on how to transition into a knowledge-based business:

*The Monster Under the Bed: How Business Is Mastering the Opportunity of Knowledge for Profit* (New York: Simon & Schuster).

How did Megan do it? Children (like all young creatures) are naturally fearless, fun-loving and full of curiosity. These traits encourage them to pick up any electronic device and start with the "Menu" button.

Those same traits keep children clicking away at the mouse, moving from screen to screen, as they "feel" their way through a new program.

The ease with which even the youngest children seem to pick up and master the most advanced technological gadgetry suggests that these kids may be developing in the human species a kind of automatic electronic intuition.

Unlike adults, many children seem to know instinctively how to work the microchip. Children "save the day" for us adults as we try to lumber alongside them.

In today's story of feeding the 5,000, there is one person whose vision and faith go unsung by John's gospel.

As the disciples are worrying about Jesus' inquiry -- "Where are we to buy bread for these people?" -- One small solution steps forward.

A little child offers as an answer to the food question a new possibility -- five barley loaves and two fish. With childlike trust, the lad offers all that he has to Jesus and the disciples.

Andrew has enough presence of mind (and perhaps a small flicker of hope) to offer these childish gifts to Jesus.

But Andrew's adult rationality gets in the way, for even as he offers the loaves and fish with one hand, he pulls them back with a defeatist, "What are they among so many?" dismissal.

Jesus likes the child's solution. He uses the little boy's gift to feed the people.

While today's lesson does not say that the child had faith in Jesus' ability to create a miracle, this child's heartfelt gift does indicate that his vision and hope were not limited by the accepted norms of the day.

He saw possibility, not puniness, in those five loaves and two fish. The child taught the disciples a lesson: They should have been looking for ways to succeed, not looking for excuses to fail.

Of course, the child himself did not have the power to multiply the loaves and fish.

But his gift opened a way for Jesus and the disciples to achieve their goal. What if Andrew had turned away the boy with the small food offering dismissing his gift as worthless and impossible?

Where would Jesus have obtained the raw material for this feeding miracle if both he and the disciples had not opened up to this unlikely, infantile source of rescue?

Children can "save the day" if we are open to them and treat their presence and input with the dignity, respect and importance they deserve.

Jesus railed angrily against any who would erect a "stumbling block" before the "little ones" because the future of the world lies in their childish faith.

A woman's 3-year-old daughter asked several times over a period of months if she might be left alone with her new baby brother.

Afraid of the possibility of sibling rivalry, the parents of the two children consulted a therapist. Should they acquiesce to the child's request?

After being assured that the 3-year-old was a non aggressive and well-adjusted child, the therapist indicated that she thought the little girl should be given the chance to be alone with her brother.

She did, however, suggest that the parent might want to listen on the intercom in the baby's room, aware that they could go to the baby in a second if there were any difficulty.

So the parents left their 3-year-old daughter with the new baby and went to their own bedroom to listen on the baby monitor speaker.

They heard the 3-year-old close the door to the nursery and walk over to the crib. Then, after a moment, they heard her say, "Baby, tell me about God. I think I'm forgetting."

This morning's lesson calls us to tiptoe back into the nursery, or the classroom, and ask our children to "tell us about God" -- to remind us about what is important for life and faith in our world today and for their world tomorrow.

"I raised up some of your children to be prophets" (Amos 2:11).

There are three areas where it's easiest to see how much we have to learn from our children --in technology, the environment, and peacemaking.

In each of these areas, we have the tools and the talents to begin transforming our world but need to open our minds and hearts and spirits to the fresh insights our children have to offer.

1. Technology -- We adults stand amazed at how easy it is for our children to use and understand all the electronic gadgetry now commonly found in our homes.

Probably the biggest difference between the way we approach our new technology and the way our children deal with it is based on the "awe factor."

We stand in awe of it, and our children do not.

Many high tech gadgets seem new and alien territory to us. My generation (the baby boomers) claims the television as our old familiar buddy, but all this other hardware and software is as new to us as it is to our parents' generation.

For young school-age children, sitting down at a computer is like sitting down at the dinner table.

It's just something you do in the course of your day.

Because they interact with computers and learn to think the way computer programs think, our kids really do have their brains "wired" differently than their parents.

Children are learning to think on many different levels all at once, to see multiple tasks and interrelated processes, and to visualize solutions that yet lay many steps down the path they are treading.

This is the technologically inspired vision we must sit at our children's feet to learn. Our old "one-step-at-a-time," "one-problem-at-a-time" way of dealing with the world simply won't cut it anymore.

It's time to sit at the feet of our children.

2. Environment – Children love recycling.

Adults still have to remind ourselves to put bottles and cans and paper into the recycling container instead of in the trash.

Children are taught recycling at a very early age.

The use-it-once-then-throw-it-away mentality that has saturated our mindset has resulted in a kind of global dump site.

Children choose to see what they can do instead of seeing the overwhelming nature of what yet must be done.

They have never had the luxury of taking their natural world, and the creatures they share it with, for granted. They carry a sense of its fragility and their own responsibility for its well-being deep in their souls.

It's time to sit at the feet of our children.

3. Peacemaking -- The sensibility and connectedness our children feel toward the natural world is carried over into a realization of the connectedness and interdependence all people share with one another.

Our kids' technological savvy has also served to shrink the diameter of the globe and erase the boundary lines between nations, races, countries and continents.

This unified vision of the world makes our children prime peacemakers.

Before giving thanks for the bread, Jesus instructs the whole milling crowd to "sit down" together.

Only as the crowds sat down as one great family were they able to pass the loaves from hand to hand until all were fed.

What do you think? When they first looked at the five loaves and two fish Jesus was blessing, did anyone in that crowd really think they had come together for any real purpose?

Perhaps they did, for they knew of Jesus' healing powers. Today's lesson teaches that those who had enough faith to "sit down" received all they could possibly want from Jesus' hands.

-- Just as we need the freshness of their insights, our children need to hear the wisdom of our experience.

-- Just as we need to learn new ways to process information, our children need to be protected from too much, too soon.

-- Just as we need to hear our children voice the plight of the earth, we need to help them learn to listen for the voice of their soul.

Just as we need our children to help us see our similarities, we need to help them discern between good and evil.

Let's not give the monsters under our beds to our children. Let's sit at their feet as they teach us how to get rid of those monsters that are threatening this world God created and loved.

AMEN!