

WGUMC December 2, 2018 “Welcome the Child”
Isaiah 11:1-10

It’s that time of year. Your mailbox is starting to fill up with requests for donations from dozens of worthy causes. Many of them will come in envelopes that feature a photograph of an impoverished child because these charitable organizations know that it’s very hard for us to throw their envelopes away. There they stay on the kitchen counter where they make us feel guilty. And oh how we wish there was a way that we could alleviate that child’s—every child’s—suffering.

Now that’s not a bad thing. Actually, it’s a good thing that we are hard-wired to care about children. It is a simple matter of biology. We wouldn’t have survived as a species, if we didn’t have a natural instinct to nurture and protect our children. And they don’t have to be our own children, either. The human race has been so successful not because we are individuals competing with each other, but because as individuals, we learned how to cooperate with one another and to sacrifice our own well-being for the well-being of

others. In other words, we learned, “It’s takes a village to raise a child.”

So it is in our DNA to recoil from scenes of children struggling to survive in faraway places: children not having enough food to eat or clothes to wear, a school to go to or adequate healthcare. But lately, we have seen children suffering much closer to home. We have seen them being separated from their parents at the Texas border and getting tear-gassed in Tijuana.

Our hearts break for these children and we want to help them. Remember the story about the Menlo Park couple who were shocked to see small children being taken from their parents’ arms and started a Facebook fundraiser for a Texas nonprofit that provides legal assistance to immigrants. In a few hours, their plea went viral and in just a few days, they raised \$20 million because we are hard-wired to care.

God knows what’s in our DNA. God knows that we will gladly do things for children that we neglect to do for ourselves. We will take

them to the doctor at the first sniffle but somehow manage to forget our annual physical. We will stay in a marriage “for the kids” and vote to raise our taxes to support their schools. We will clean up their (not our) environment and even come to church not for ourselves but for our children.

We pastors say, “Thank God for children!” They really do have a way of bringing us together and compelling us to work together. We wouldn’t have made it this far without them. So here’s a new slogan for you: “It takes a child to raise a village.”

While I was at my sister’s house in Tahoe for Thanksgiving, I glanced at the *Chronicle* and saw the article about Bat Boy. Do you remember Miles Scott, who was a five-year-old cancer patient back in 2013? With the help of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the mayor of San Francisco, the police chief and a squadron of uniformed cops, Miles put on a cape, hopped into a black Lamborghini-turned-Batmobile and rushed around San Francisco one day to rescue a damsel in distress and to catch an archvillain at AT&T Park. That

little boy did what no politician could do: bring 10,000 people out on an October day to cheer the triumph of good over evil. Well, that was five years ago. Miles is now ten and cancer free.

His achievement, not only in beating cancer but in bringing people together, made me think about our Scripture reading this morning. The Prophet Isaiah gives us a picture of a peaceable kingdom where good triumphs over evil not just for an afternoon of fun but forever. It's a picture of a kingdom where age-old enemies are reconciled, broken relationships are restored, all creatures live in harmony and all children live in safety. We desperately want to go there, but how do we get there?

Jesus spent a lot of time talking about the kingdom of God and how to get there. To his disciples, he said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." [Mt 18:3] He also said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." [Mt 19:14]

Jesus gives us the key to understanding Isaiah's prophecy. When Isaiah says, "And a little child shall lead them," he is talking about how to get to the peaceable kingdom. And I have to say that his prophecy is coming true in some amazing ways today.

Kelsey Cascadia Rose Juliana began advocating for the environment when she was ten years old. At 15, she sued the Governor of Oregon, calling for a carbon emissions reduction plan. When she was 18, she walked from Nebraska to Washington, D.C., 1600 miles, to raise awareness about global warming. At the age of 19, she became the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit against the federal government, claiming that it's inaction with regard to climate change was unconstitutionally depriving children and all future generations of their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That lawsuit is still proceeding through the courts.

Then there's David Hogg and Emma González who were Marjory Stoneham Douglas High School students when 14 students and 3 staff members were shot and killed in Parkland, Florida, on

Valentine's Day this year. But they weren't satisfied with our "thoughts and prayers." Along with their classmates, they started the #NeverAgain and #EnoughIsEnough movement. These kids organized the March For Our Lives attended by 800,000 people in D.C. a month later.

You may have heard of them, but you probably haven't heard of Jasilyn Charger. She was 19 when her friend committed suicide on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota. When she returned there for the funeral, a few days later, another friend committed suicide. In response to an epidemic of mental illness among youth on the reservation, Jasilyn and some friends started a support group. They called it the One Mind Youth Movement. They set up a safe house where young people could get counseling. Meeting together they talked about other threats to their health and their community. So they decided to set up a prayer camp near the proposed route for the Dakota Access pipeline on the nearby Standing Rock Reservation. You probably didn't know that that months-long

protest that drew thousands of people from all over the world was started by young people praying.

Finally, we have Ethan Oltermari, a high school senior who attended a mostly white UMC in Greenwood, Mississippi, down in the Delta. He saw the stark racial divide in his community and wanted to do something about it. “The Lord just kept putting something on my heart,” he said. So he decided to organize a revival in the hopes that it would help bring about some racial reconciliation. He called it Revival on the River and put together an interracial lineup of praise bands and gospel ensembles and invited blacks and whites, Baptists and Catholics, Pentecostals and Presbyterians. Six hundred people showed up the first year, 1200 the second year. Not surprisingly, Ethan is preparing for the ministry.

I tell you these stories because they teach us a lesson at the close of this chaotic year: Don’t let the bad news drown out the Good News. For us grownups who have all but given up, these kids show us Jesus. They still believe life is worth living, the world is

worth loving, and people are worth saving. They still believe in Christmas and where Christmas is heading. We could be following these children who are following the Christ child who is leading them and the whole Creation right into God's kingdom.

Remember the Book of Genesis, how God started out with Adam as a full-grown man. You know how well that worked. So in the New Testament, we read about how God began again. God sent us a new Adam [I Cor 15:45] named Jesus, but this time he came as a little child. I promise you that this child, though he will get into trouble as he grows up, won't get us kicked out of Eden. Quite the opposite, this child will lead us into the kingdom of heaven.

So that we don't forget this promise, God sends us children. They will not only help us get to the kingdom of heaven. They will show us how to build the kingdom here on earth. And since we grownups haven't been able to do the job on our own, we need to welcome them, whoever they are, whatever they look like, wherever they come from. To bring that home, I want to close with one more

story, a short video of how the Mesias United Methodist Church in Nogales, Arizona, is welcoming Christ by welcoming children.