

“Teach the Children”  
Rev. David B. Lindsey  
6.1.08

I. All that’s going on in worship today

Today has been a busy day in which we have celebrated the young people in our midst in a lovely way. We have heard music from our children’s choirs; we have handed out Bibles to our second graders; and we have given gifts to our graduating senior(s). In our worship, we have seen and celebrated a wide array of young people from early childhood up through the beginnings of adulthood.

One of the chief tasks we have as a congregation is to welcome and celebrate young folks into our midst. The Christian Education of our youngest children and youth grounds them in the ways of God, creating the building blocks of an open Christian faith. As children grow in our midst, their burgeoning talents start to take shape. A great many young people in our midst have demonstrated artistic talents and interests, which we see at their talent show that we call the Kids’ Home Companion. When our children become teenagers, their minds begin to expand and develop, allowing them to question what they’ve been told and begin to name and live their understanding of the life of faith. During their teenage years, our young people often develop hearts for service. We see evidence of young people turning to the wider world, as our teenagers participate in the annual mission trip (as they will on the upcoming Heifer Project trip).

The raw material of talent and passion, of creativity and concern for others, beats within the hearts of a great many of our children and teenagers. And yet this raw material cannot be fully developed with time and attention from folks like Sarah Ludwig, Nathan Roberts, our Christian Education board, and our Sunday

School teachers. I spend a little time with our young ones during children's time in worship, and I will be helping with the education of some of our teenagers through confirmation, which will be beginning in the fall. But Sarah, Nathan, the C.E. Board, and our Sunday School teachers have the most direct ministerial impact on our young people, and I extend my thanks to all of them.

## II. Scriptures for the day

We as a congregation are working hard to teach our children, a calling that comes to us from the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. The writer of Deuteronomy (sometimes called the Deuteronomist) encouraged his readers to “teach the children” and to hold fast to God's commands. He asked us to write God's commands on doorposts, put them on our foreheads, wrap them around our arms, talk about them on walks with friends – whatever we're doing, wherever we do it, the Deuteronomist encourages us to keep the commands of God foremost in our minds. And we as a congregation strive to do exactly that.

Since we are supposed to hold so fast to God's commands, taking great care to teach them to our children, I suppose we ought to look and see what commands the Deuteronomist has in mind. If we look back a few verses, we can find what he means in words that Jesus picked up on years later. The Deuteronomist writes that we are to love God and to serve God with all our heart and soul.<sup>1</sup> Interesting. Did you catch those two verbs? We are *to love* and *to serve* God with our entire heart and soul (in other words, with all that we are). The Deuteronomist, I suppose, could have told us *to fear* God, *to fight* for God, *to kill* those who don't believe in God, or just about anything else. Instead, though, we are instructed, above all else *to love* God and *to serve* God. These are the words that we are to teach our children, put on our doorposts, place on

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 11:13.

our foreheads, wrap around our arms, and talk about on walks with our friends.

Jesus weighs in on this topic in his own way. In our gospel reading for this morning, Jesus gave a strong imperative to his hearers. His words imply that many would hear his words but ignore them; that others would hear his words and remember them; that still others would hear his words and believe them; and that still others would hear his words, call on his name, and be able to help others. Shockingly, though, Jesus suggests that this is not enough. He suggested that only those who heard his words and lived them out would be his true disciples. This is quite something, in my mind: folks might hear Jesus, believe him, and even help to heal people by calling on his name. But this is not enough? How could this not be enough? Near as I can tell, Jesus means that we must be living embodiments of his chief commands: to love God with all our being, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Love – this is the heart of the life of faith to which the Old and New Testaments point. And this love is what we are to teach our children to know and to embody.

### III. Conclusion

Some years ago, I met a woman who I think understood these truths intimately. She grew up in a tough home on the East Coast. She grew up with little support from her family and almost no educational or employment opportunities. When she was eight years old, she began having to take herself to church because her parents wouldn't go. As she got older, she moved out to the West Coast to try and make a new life for herself. She married a nice guy who made a modest living doing construction, and she worked part-time as a lunch lady in the local high school. They didn't have a lot of money, they didn't have a lot of support, and by all accounts they lived a modest life that few in our country would describe as remarkable.

But on the weekends, this woman was a Christian Education director. That was when she came *alive*. She had a natural rapport with children, and the kids in her Sunday School loved her dearly. She started out as a volunteer Sunday School teacher, and over the years had worked her way up to being the staff member at a well-to-do congregation. Surrounded by wealthy congregants, she would walk onto a church campus overflowing with women who had substantially more money, power, and opportunities than she did in the wider world. But there, on Sunday mornings, this woman was a queen, orchestrating the spiritual education of tens (and sometimes hundreds) of young people every week. She didn't have a lot of worldly power, but this woman was possessed of great power in the church. She figured out a long time ago that, whatever you do in life to earn money, that your real calling is something much more profound.

A congregation like ours has several important tasks, but one of the most important tasks is the spiritual nurture of our children and youth. This is our calling, our true vocation from God. We are not just laborers, managers, advisers, consultants, and such. We are not just consumers; we are not just a demographic. At heart, we are children of God, and our task is to nurture the spiritual lives of all God's children. We do this as parents, as grandparents, as aunts and uncles, as friends and mentors, as Sunday School teachers and church staff members. We are called by God through the witnesses of the Old and New Testaments to love God, our neighbors, and ourselves. There is our true vocation in life, and we can express it in many forms. Today, we honor all those who are doing this work in any way, shape or form. May God grant us strength to keep living out our true calling to love God with our whole selves, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to teach others to do the same.

AMEN.