

Caleb Evans (15)

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Date: 03 March 2019

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, everyone whom! the Lord our God calls to himself. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So I'm going to begin this morning with the bottom line up front, and that is this. Jesus is for children. Now I do have to say, when I plan this sermon series that is ongoing about the responsibilities of the Christian life, I envisioned that I was going to do it in a super orderly way. I had this schedule kind of tentatively planned. And so I thought at first that what I would be preaching about would be prayer this morning. But what I am going to preach about this morning is something that I was planning on preaching in this series anyway.

When I realized that we would be baptizing one of the little ones of our congregation this morning, I felt it fitting that I adjust the schedule. I trust that none of you are scandalized by that.

You can probably guess what I am preaching about this morning just from the readings and the occasion and what I said at the very beginning.

[1:30] But it's this. Anglicans have long believed that a key responsibility that Christians have is to ensure that children are brought up to love and serve the Lord.

Obviously, seeing that as a responsibility is nothing new. But I do think that we are living in a time and we are living in a culture that makes that responsibility that causes it to have some unique challenges.

I remember before I was ordained, I was a college kid and a youth minister. I went to a session on youth ministry and heard the point that in the day and age that we are living in now, in the culture that we are living in now, we could no longer trust the culture to be a positive influence on the development of our children.

Is that reality a surprise to anyone? I doubt that I am telling you anything that you don't know. But it is something that we need to remember. If we want our children to lead godly lives when they grow up, we're going to need to teach them to lead godly lives.

Before I go any further, I just want to mention that this sermon is directed at more than those of us in the church who are parents of small children. This responsibility to ensure that children are brought up to love and to serve the Lord applies to every Christian.

[3:03] We are part of a big family as Christians. I'm reminded of that when I look out into the congregation and I see someone else in the congregation holding my baby. We are part of a big family and we are all here to love and support one another as we seek to follow Jesus Christ.

That means that each of you have a responsibility to the children in our midst to show them what it means in word and in deed to be disciples of Jesus.

It takes a church to raise a Christian child. Which is why in just a few minutes in the baptismal service, all of you are going to be asked if you will do everything in your power to support little Annalise in her life in Christ, I trust that you will.

Now when we think about bringing up children, we inevitably run into the question of what our goals are. What is the most important thing that we want for our children or our grandchildren or the children in our church?

I think that we see the most important thing in the gospel passage that we have appointed for this morning and that we read just a minute ago.

[4:23] Where we read Jesus saying, Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. Let the children come to Jesus. We might want plenty of good things for our children, but none of those things are more important than that these children know Jesus.

Let the children come to Jesus. That is our goal. It is why also we need to make sure that we don't hinder them. We hinder them in all kinds of ways.

We hinder them when we don't do everything in our power to teach them the gospel. We hinder them when they need to know what faith in Christ means, what the Christian life means, and we give them fluff instead.

We hinder them when we don't show them by example what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We hinder them when we don't include them in the life of the church, either by way of failing to bring them to church, or when we adopt the attitude that the church is only for the grown-ups.

[5:41] We hinder them when we forget that they don't need to be more like us to be disciples of Jesus. We need to be more like them to be disciples of Jesus.

We hinder them when we give them the impression that the gospel is not for children. The gospel is for children. Jesus is for children.

Belonging to Jesus is for children. We should not have the expectation that they have to get older before they know Jesus. Jesus is for children.

Think about our reading from Acts for this morning. Peter has been preaching about the death and resurrection of Jesus. He's talked about the forgiveness that is found in the name of Jesus, the promise of eternal life, the promise of salvation, the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

He's talked about the call to repent, the call to be baptized and become disciples of Jesus. And then he says something really interesting. Peter says the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

[6:56] Remember the audience here. Peter is talking to Jewish folks who are about to come to faith in Christ. The pattern of walking with God that they knew that God gave them in the Old Testament fully incorporated the children and God worked through families to accomplish his purposes for salvation.

In the Old Testament, we see clearly that God has a special claim on the children of believers, and I would say that we see that same claim in the New Testament.

Now that model seems weird to us as 21st century Westerners because extreme individualism is our mindset pretty much by default. But it wasn't weird to God's Old Testament people.

God even told them to circumcise their baby boys, to give them the sign, the reminder of his promises to save his people, a reminder that those promises were for the children, just as they were for the adults.

So when Peter's hearers heard the gospel preached, heard that there is salvation in the cross of Christ, and that there is forgiveness for our sins, and then they heard that this promise is for their children, the thought that Peter only meant that the promise would be for their children when the children got older would never have crossed their minds.

[8:22] I raise this point because there are a couple of models for how Bible-believing Christians view their children, and the differences between those models make a difference practically in how we try to bring up our children to know and to serve the Lord.

Anglicans definitely follow one model over the other. It has an impact on our approach to raising up children in the faith. So I think it's important to talk about the differences between these two models. One model, and this is one that at least some of us in this congregation grew up with, is basically like this. The children of believers are regarded as little unbelievers. The goal in bringing them up is to teach them in the hope that one day, when they are old enough and know enough facts about the gospel, they will have a conversion experience and become Christians.

Now in this model, babies are not baptized, and small children typically are not considered members of the church. The model that Anglicans and many other Christians hold to, on the other hand, depends on the biblical example that God's promises apply both to believers and to their children.

We believe that God has a special claim on the children of believers, and that the children of believers ought to be treated as members of the church. You can see an example of that belief working itself out in just a few minutes when we baptize Annalise.

[10:04] Because we believe that God's promises in Jesus Christ are especially for them, for the children of believers. We bring them up as members of the church, to know God as their Father and

to know Jesus as their Savior.

Now, that doesn't mean that we believe that being baptized and being brought up in the church is a guarantee of eternal salvation as if it's a magic trick or getting your ticket punched, as if it does not require that the child develop saving faith in Christ.

But it does mean that God ordinarily gives these little children faith through the witness of godly parents, and through their participation as members of Christ's church, where they are brought to Jesus no matter how small they are.

Now, I grew up in a church, my background is not Anglican, that did not regard the children of believers as members of the body of Christ. I was still taught the gospel and taught it quite faithfully. I have no complaints on that front. But my experience was one of not being included as a member of the body of Christ as a child. With that only changing when I had a conversion experience as a teenager and was baptized.

[11 : 26] My wife, on the other hand, does not remember a time when she didn't believe that Jesus was her Savior, which honestly is what I desire for my children and all of the other children in our midst.

That doesn't mean that we think that Christianity consists of merely going through the motions, as if conversion to Christ is unessential. Conversion to Christ, faith in Christ, is absolutely essential.

But as one of our diocesan-senate speakers mentioned a couple years ago, quick club for diocesan-senate, you should go. He mentioned that we believe as Anglicans that conversion to Christ can happen in early childhood, can indeed happen even in infancy.

God can give saving faith to a person well before they are able to wrap their minds around the details of systematic theology, because faith is something that God gives us, not something that we work up through our superior intellectual capacity.

My daughter Mia, from the time that she was three years old, could explain the basics of the gospel and gave every indication that she really believed it.

[12 : 41] She believed that Jesus died for her sins, and because Jesus died and rose again for her, that she was going to have eternal life. From early on, she grieved over her sins, and began confessing her sins to God regularly from an early age.

I'm not in any way trying to brag over this. It is God's grace, not my parenting, I assure you. But I think that an early understanding of the gospel, an early trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, children early in life being little disciples is the norm and not the exception.

And I think that sometimes if it seems like that is the exception, it is because we have assumed that little children are too little to come to Jesus. We know what he thinks about that, don't we?

And so the message to Annalise in a few moments when she is baptized will be this. Annalise, you might not understand it yet, but Jesus died for you.

Jesus rose again for you. You belong to Jesus. He is claiming you. He is showing his love for you, and you are receiving your marching orders today to put your trust in him as your Savior and to be his faithful soldier waging war under his banner against the world, the flesh, and the devil all the days of your life.

[14 : 13] What we need to remember as we bring up children as parents, or we hope as grandparents or aunts or uncles or fellow members of the church, we need to remember that the call to raise up children to know and serve the Lord is a great example of what the Great Commission looks like in practice.

Jesus says, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. That should be familiar to us in the lives of these children in our midst.

This morning we are baptizing. Just a little while ago, the children were in Sunday school learning the Scriptures. Now they're hearing the Bible preached and participating in worship, being taught to trust in Christ and to follow Him as His disciples.

In other words, we are seeing the Great Commission fulfilled before our eyes in the lives of these little ones in our midst. That shouldn't be a surprise to us.

[15 : 37] That shouldn't be unusual to us. Again, in both Testaments, the Bible is clear. God has a special claim on the children of believers. So believers are not to treat their children as little pagans,

but to raise them to know and love the Lord.

Now much of what I'm saying about how we raise children should be familiar to all of us, because at the most basic level, I want to emphasize that raising children to know Christ is just one example of the task of making disciples.

When we talk about bringing up children, we're really talking about making disciples. That's what it is. We baptize them. We teach them. What do we teach them?

We teach them the Gospel. That Christ died for them, that only through faith in His blood can their sins be forgiven, that the wages of sin is death, but that Jesus rose again for them so that they can have eternal life.

That Jesus calls them to be His disciples, to follow Him, to lead lives that are holy and godly. Well, it's the same stuff that we teach anyone when we're making disciples, isn't it?

[16:51] And children can be taught that the same as anyone else. I'll never forget a couple of years ago, I asked my daughter Mia what she had learned about in Sunday school that day. She says, Oh, we talked about how holy God is.

Okay. Corleen had taught the children about God's holiness. Thank you, Corleen. And Mia talked about it for days. Why wouldn't we teach our children about things of substance?

Things like God's holiness, things like sin, things like salvation, things like discipleship. Why wouldn't we teach them? Because children come to faith and grow as disciples in the same way as anyone else does.

The last couple of weeks, we've talked about the Word and the sacraments as means of grace. Those are for children, too. Parents make disciples of children through bringing children to a church that preaches the pure gospel according to the Word of God and rightly administers the sacraments.

And all of us in the church family share the responsibility of doing everything that we can to support these children so that they learn to put their trust in Christ and they seek to follow Him.

[18:12] That responsibility to support children in the church doesn't just fall on our children's ministry leaders. I've seen this truth in practice on tons of occasions.

I've seen people in our church who are not Sunday school teachers, not in children's ministry, talking with our youth about Christ and about the Christian life at coffee hour or at game night or at all kinds of other parish events.

And I am reminded, yes, it really does take a church to raise a Christian child. And parents or grandparents or other family members make disciples of their children at home through teaching them the gospel, studying the scriptures with them, and praying with them.

No special secret to children's discipleship. Now, I would add here, going to church is great.

It's even essential. I wouldn't be standing up here right now if I didn't feel that way. Sunday school is great, especially with the awesome children's ministry leaders that we have.

[19:24] But when we think about our children, we need to realize that the two weeks or two hours in church every week is very important, but it must not be all of the spiritual training that our children are getting.

It must not be the only place where they are taught the Bible or pray with their families. They need more than that. Because we need to be aware in our day and age that if we are not making disciples of our children, the world is not going to hesitate to make them its disciples.

They are growing up in a world that does not have following Jesus as its goal. We need to have nothing short of the Great Commission in mind as we think about these little children in our midst. We need to be intentional about making them into disciples by God's grace, baptizing them and teaching them. And that commitment is about to be evident in the baptism that is going to happen this morning.

The Anglican theologian J.I. Packer talks about what happens, what it's about, what we're doing when we baptize an infant. And he says this, In infant baptism, we consecrate young children to God, we commit them by proxy to thoroughgoing adult Christianity, ask God to bring this about and administer to them God's own covenant sign, seal, and bond of this full adult relationship.

[21:15] Believing that our actions accord with his will and that he is a faithful, loving, prayer-answering God. We trust that he has now received the children covenantally and in some way started the work in them that we have asked him to do.

So we finally pray that the children will be led on from regeneration thus begun into fullness of faith and faithfulness. So let's remember as we prepare to baptize today and to commit ourselves to supporting the baptized, renew our commitment to all of the children in our midst that our God is a faithful, loving, prayer-answering God, that he has a claim on these precious little children, and that Jesus is for them.

My prayer for Annalise, for all the children in this congregation, is that they would indeed be led into the fullness of faith and faithfulness to the glory of Jesus Christ our Savior.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.