

Making Disciples of Our Children

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 May 2017

[0:00] Amen. So I was initially thinking I would preach on John 14 this week, but Bishop Marcus kind of stole my thunder on that front.

He did it better than I could, so I didn't want to compete with that. Now, that being said, I think that it is fitting, in light of Mother's Day, for me to begin this sermon by talking about my own mother. Now, as many of you know, I think you know, I was raised by a single mom. A lot of you know her. Now, when I was growing up, I thought of her as a superhero. She'd work all day. She'd come home. She'd make dinner. She'd play with us. She'd bathe us. She'd put us to bed. And then she'd get up the next morning and do it all over again. She served her sons in a way that I think was truly heroic.

Can't express the amount of respect that I have for her. But she wasn't just a single mom. She was and is a Christian mom. She taught me about our Lord Jesus from an early age.

[1:50] She prayed with me. She studied the Bible with me. The last words I heard before I closed my eyes to go to sleep at night were the words of the hymn Amazing Grace sung by my mom night after night.

When I was sick, in the middle of the night, as a small child, she would rock me, sing hymns to me until I drifted back to sleep. This morning, in light of Mother's Day, and in light of our reading from Deuteronomy appointed for this morning, I want us to think about how we raise our children in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

Now, this concern obviously applies to those of us who have small children. But I also want us to think about how this applies to all of us, how it applies to us as a church and the way that we approach things.

I want us to think about God's covenant with us, how that applies to our children, what that means for them. It would probably be good to begin with defining terms.

We have a lawyer in the house. Can you tell us what covenant means? Contract. Contract. Contract. Promise. Yes. God is a God who makes covenants with His people.

[3:11] He saves His people and asks them to live in a way that is pleasing to Him, in gratitude for what He's done to deliver them. That's what we see going on in Deuteronomy 6.

God is telling His people Israel to love and obey Him, to teach their children to do the same because He has saved them from slavery in Egypt. Now, something I really want us to notice here, I think this is really key.

God's covenant with Israel includes responsibilities to the children. Look with me in Deuteronomy 6, starting in verse 20. When your son asks you in time to come, what is the meaning of the testimonies and statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?

Then you shall say to your son, we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the Lord showed signs and wonders great and grievous against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household before our eyes.

God knows the children are going to have questions because the people of Israel do not live like their neighbors.

[4:38] They're probably going to ask things like, why do we worship God? Only one God. Why do we worship Him alone? Why are we circumcised? Why do we observe the Passover? Why do you keep the laws that you're keeping?

What is this all about? And they're supposed to tell the children. Our people. You. Me. We were slaves in Egypt and the Lord brought us out.

The Lord saved us and brought us into the land He promised us. So we obey Him because He redeemed us. Now it's very clear in the Old Testament that the privileges and the responsibilities of God's covenant with Israel include the children.

The sons are circumcised as the son of the covenant, and the children are part of God's covenant people with the benefits and the responsibilities that are entailed there.

Now why is this important to us? Because God is a covenant God. He makes and keeps promises to His people.

[5:45] And just as the Israelites were under the Old Covenant, the church is under the New Covenant, which our Lord Jesus established with His own blood. Now the Israelites were pretty clear about the status of their children and how they were to treat them.

Their children were part of God's covenant people. Now what do Christians, people of the New Covenant, think about the status of their children?

Are the responsibilities and the promises of the covenant for them? Are they part of God's covenant people, which in the New Covenant is the church? Or are we to regard our little ones in the same way we would regard unbelievers?

Well, to be honest with you, Christians have answered that question in different ways. Now as Anglicans, our approach is to believe that yes, the children of believers are part of God's covenant people, the church.

The promise and responsibilities, God's covenant with the church, extend to them. Just as the Old Covenant included the children of believers, we think that the New Covenant includes the children of believers.

[7:05] That's why we think that when the Apostle Peter says on the day of Pentecost, after preaching the gospel, that the promise is to you and your children, Peter means here that the promise of those who believe and to their children.

That's what we read in Acts 3. On top of that, the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7, that the children of believers are holy, that is, they are set apart. So we believe that means that God's covenant does extend to the children of believers, since they are set apart.

We believe that since the sign of the Old Covenant, circumcision, was given to children, we should give the sign of the New Covenant, which is baptism to children, to mark that they belong in the church and that they belong to God.

So what does it mean when we baptize them, and what does that mean for how we bring them up?

Well, the Anglican theologian Dr. J.I.

Packer puts it this way. In infant baptism, we consecrate young children to God. We commit them by proxy to thoroughgoing adult Christianity. We ask God to bring this about and administer to them God's own covenant, sign, seal, and bond of this full adult relationship.

[8:27] 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 in them the work we have asked Him to do.

So we consecrate them to God, acknowledging that the children of believers are set apart. We commit them in the expectation that they will develop full, mature, personal faith in Christ.

And in baptism, the promises of God's covenant are signed and sealed for them. It demonstrates that the promises of the gospel are for them. So we pray for them.

We trust that God and His goodness will start His work in them and that by God's grace, they will grow into a mature profession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Now, that doesn't mean that all the children who are baptized will go on as if automatically to eternal salvation.

[9:33] They certainly won't apart from saving faith in Jesus. It doesn't mean that the children won't need to develop mature and personal faith in Christ. They will.

It doesn't mean that there is a guarantee that they won't grow up to reject the benefits of the covenant that have been extended to them and go astray. But it does mean they are to grow up in the church, in the body of Christ, as part of the body.

It does mean that they are to grow up regarding the promises of the gospel as being promises to them. And it does mean that we believe this ordinarily to be the first step, so to speak, in their growing into personal and mature Christian faith.

It does mean that we shouldn't regard our children as little unbelievers, little pagans. It does mean that we are to teach them and help them to grow into mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

Now, why did the director go on rambling so long about covenants and circumcision and baptism? Some of you might not have had your morning coffee yet.

[10 : 45] If that's the case, I'm sorry. But I went on so long on that point because I really wanted to set the framework for what I'd like us to consider next.

I want us to consider the way we bring up our children in light of the Great Commission. Now, on Tuesday night, Bishop Dogo led us in an absolutely excellent study on the importance of evangelism.

I think everyone who was there would agree that it was incredible. The Great Commission, the call to evangelize, is something that, as Christians, we ignore or put on the back burner all too often. But Jesus said, 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.

We obviously know that part of the charge to make disciples is to go to those outside the church and proclaim the gospel.

[11 : 48] We get that. But I want us to remember that part of the charge of making disciples has to do with proclaiming the gospel within the church to our children.

Now, a lot of studies are suggesting that Islam is and will be the world's fastest growing religion in the years ahead.

Do you know why they're projecting that? Now, it's not really due to an overwhelming trend of conversion to Islam. It's because Muslims are having more children than the rest of us, and they're raising them to be Muslims.

If a false religion is the world's fastest growing one because its adherents are raising their children to practice it and taking that seriously, what does that mean for us, we who have the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ?

What does that mean for us? Now, I'm not saying this to detract from the overwhelming importance of going out into every corner of the world proclaiming the gospel.

[12 : 56] Not at all. I just want to point out the incredible importance of raising our children to know and to love the Lord Jesus. It's part of what the Lord commissioned us to do.

So in our church, how do we do that? We've already said we baptize them, and then we teach them. That's the pattern that's laid out for us in the Great Commission for making disciples.

We teach them to believe the gospel. We teach them to put their faith in Christ. We teach them what it means to know, to love, to obey the Lord.

We teach them what it means to be disciples of Jesus. We do that in the church and in the Christian home. Now, I have to be honest.

These days, churches and Christian families often don't do a very good job of this. The idea in the church, not this church fortunately, but in the broader church, too often is behind children's ministry is basically this.

[14 : 09] Let's get the kids out of the way. Let's get them playing in some other room so that the adults can worship and listen to the sermon. Now, if the kids are just a distraction and an afterthought, and we want them to grow up to be mature disciples of Jesus, that approach isn't going to cut it.

Now, I have been so pleased in our congregation with our children and teen Sunday school leaders. Corleen, Suzanne, Mark have been doing an amazing job.

They're teaching the children and the teens the gospel. They're teaching them biblical truth. They're teaching them the catechism. They're teaching them about salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

They're teaching them about the finished work of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. They're not learning fluff in Sunday school. They're teaching them about the life-giving power of his resurrection.

If we want our kids to withstand the onslaught of a culture that is opposed to the gospel, we need to ground them in biblical truth.

[15 : 21] We must. We need to teach them that Jesus died for sinners, that Jesus died for our salvation. And we need to teach them what it means to have faith in Jesus and to live as his disciples in this world, as witnesses to him.

And just as they need to be in Sunday school, we need to have them in worship with us. They need to see their parents worship it. They need to hear the gospel preached, even if they sometimes make noise and distract us.

And they inevitably will. Sometimes it's my kid doing that. But the gospel message is for them. Biblical truth is for them. Of course, we have to present these things in ways that they can understand.

But we have to present the gospel to them. We need to avoid the contemporary assumption that children can't understand and believe the gospel.

That just isn't true. The gospel is profound, but it is also so simple that a child can understand it and believe it. Now, I did a little experiment as I was preparing for this sermon.

[16 : 31] I said to Mia, Mia, what is our hope of salvation? Who saves us? She said, God does. I asked her how he saves us. And she told me that it's through the death of Jesus for our sins.

They can get it. A few weeks ago, we were in the car. Out of nowhere, unprompted, Mia says, Daddy, I have decided that I believe in Jesus.

Because one day I want to go to heaven and see him for real. Amen. We must teach our children the gospel.

And that is not just a task for Sunday school teachers. Not just a task for priests. Not just a task for parents. When a child is baptized, don't we all promise to support that child in his or her life in Christ?

We do, don't we? If it takes a village to raise a child, as the saying goes, it certainly takes a church to raise a Christian child. We're one big family and we're in this thing together.

[17 : 36] Each and every one of us has the responsibility, through word and example, to help our little ones know and serve the Lord. But what happens in the Christian home, what children learn from their parents is also essential.

And grandparents, insofar as you're able to have that formative influence on your grandchildren, this is for you as well. We have to be serious about teaching our kids the faith in the home.

We have to teach them the gospel in the home. We have to read the Bible with them in the home.

We have to teach them in the home, in the family, what it means for us to know Jesus.

We have to teach them how to confess their sins and come to trusting Christ for forgiveness. We have to teach them how to pray. We have to ask ourselves, what are the kids learning from us?

Are they learning as much about godliness from their family, their Christian family, as they're learning about sin elsewhere? Are we teaching them to know and obey the Lord?

[18 : 53] Because I can tell you this, the world will teach them to disobey the Lord. I hope we're teaching them. I hope we take the opportunities we have.

If we're living as a Christian family, if we're teaching them the gospel, they will ask us why it is we do what we do. Why we're in church on Sunday morning instead of playing hockey.

Why we believe what we do. Why our lifestyle is different. They'll notice that. They'll ask. They'll ask as God knew the Israelite children would ask, as we see in our reading from Deuteronomy.

They will ask why. What will we tell them? We were slaves. We were in bondage. We were in bondage to sin.

We were in bondage to death. We were in bondage to the devil. But the Lord brought us out of slavery with a mighty hand when he sent his only son to die and rise again for our salvation.

[20 : 02] God brought us out of slavery through the death and resurrection of his son. And we are no longer in bondage. So we tell our little ones.

That's why. That's why we live no longer for ourselves. But we live for the one who died and rose again for us. When our children or our grandchildren or the little ones who are part of our church family ask us, is that what we will tell them?

Now, I do want to mention, I know that some of you have expressed concern for your adult children who have gone astray and have turned from the Lord.

I know that you pray for them all the time. You raise them in the church. You raise them in a Christian home. You raise them to know the Lord. And it appears that they're not walking with him. I want to address you in particular this morning.

You dedicated them to the Lord. You made sure that they heard the gospel. But they're not walking with him. First of all, if you raise them to know the truth and they have made the choice to reject it, that's not your fault.

[21 : 16] I want to encourage you this morning so that you can encourage them. Please encourage them to claim the offer of the gospel that has been extended to them from childhood.

Please don't give up on them. Please keep calling them to repentance and to faith in the Lord. Now I know it can be awkward to have these conversations with family members.

I know it can be difficult. Still remember the first time I ever asked a family member, So do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? It was uncomfortable. I get it.

But it's too important for us not to do it. Don't give up. Keep calling them back. The children in our congregation, the children in our families, are growing up in a culture that is increasingly hostile to faith in Christ.

But, we have the confidence that God is at work in the lives of these precious little ones. And in that confidence, we can answer the call to tell them about the one who set us free from bondage.

[22 : 34] To teach them about the only true God. The only God who is able and willing to save.

Unto Him, the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen.