

12th Sunday of Pentecost August 28, 2022

GETTING CHRIST INTO THE HEARTS OF OUR CHILDREN

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

Scripture Readings

Romans 3:21-28

Matthew 7:15-29

Hymns

628, 692, 625, 631

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) unless otherwise noted

Some things in life are simple. You take your phone out of your pocket to do a little of this and little of that and a message is instantly sent to someone who may be thousands of miles away. You go online, key in some numbers, click your mouse a few times, and money is automatically transferred from one account to another. Or (something not so high-tech) you go to the kitchen sink, lift the handle, and water is deposited from the tap right into your glass. It's that simple.

If only being a Christian parent, or a pastor, or teacher were that easy. If only there were a "send" button on our hearts, that when we pushed it, it would automatically transfer our trust and love for Christ into the hearts of our children. But it doesn't work that way, does it? Children are not electronic gadgets. They are living beings with a heart, a mind, and an eternal soul. More than that they are born sinfully corrupt, which means they are not naturally receptive to the message of the Gospel. Just because you "text" them (teach them) the Word doesn't mean the message will automatically transfer into their hearts. The sinful nature is like a delete button. The message is sent but it doesn't mean it's always taken to heart. This can be frustrating for those who try to impress God's Word on the hearts of children. Add to all this, that Satan and the world around us are constantly trying to interfere with our efforts to bring up godly children, well, it makes it all the more difficult.

When our children were baptized, the Holy Spirit did transfer Christ into their hearts. He worked faith in their hearts, making a saving connection between them and the Triune God. But it doesn't end with Baptism. Parents, assisted by the Church, have the responsibility of training children in the Word so that the Spirit can do the all-important work of keeping that faith connection between the Savior and our children intact. On this Education Sunday, we explore Scripture's method for raising God-fearing children. What does the Bible say about the challenging task of handing down, or transferring, the Christian faith to the next generation? What does it say about ... GETTING CHRIST INTO THE HEARTS OF OUR CHILDREN? Let's read what it says from God's Holy Word, recorded in Deuteronomy chapter six, verse four through seven:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

1.

When it comes to getting Christ into the hearts of our children, we, first of all, need to beware of the competition. Many things are competing for the hearts and minds of our children and young people. Many things are trying to take the place of God in their hearts. But, whatever those things may be, none of them can forgive the sins of our children and bring them safely into Heaven. Only the LORD God, Who sent His Son to keep God's commandments and die as their substitute, can do that. Only He loves them with a limitless and everlasting love. Therefore we need to diligently teach our children that there is one God, Who alone is worthy of our fear, love and trust. That's what Moses was impressing upon the hearts of the Israelites in our text when He says: **"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."**

So as fathers and mothers, as a church, we need to watch out for other things creeping into the lives of our children which become idols—things they love and begin to live for more than God, and which can ultimately destroy their faith and rob them of salvation. These idols might be electronic gadgets, or money, or sports, or friends, or movie or music stars, or you name it. Our text says: **"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."**

Obviously because both we and our children are sinful creatures we'll never, in this life, reach the perfection that God demands with these words. Far from it. In fact, we teach our children that they are sinners who deserve to go to hell because they have broken God's laws. But then we take special care to impress upon their hearts how the LORD God, despite their sin, perfectly loves them with all His heart and strength. By constantly assuring them of God's love and forgiveness through Jesus' cross we unleash the power of the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit Who transfers into their hearts a genuine respect, a real love, and an abiding trust in the One True God. The result is that as imperfect as they are, the aim of their life becomes one of pleasing God, living for God, and trusting in God Who loves them and forgives them, no matter what, for Christ's sake.

2.

In a moment we'll get into the method we are to use in order to accomplish the goal of bringing up children whose life aim is loving the LORD God with all their hearts, minds, and souls.

But before we get into the approach advocated by our text, remember, fathers and mothers, that the church is here to assist you—not to replace you, or to do it for you, but to help you. The help is there in the weekly Sunday morning service. It's there in our Christian Day School, Sunday School, and Vacation Bible School. Our church body provides a wonderful Christ-centered secondary education at Immanuel in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Family visits with the pastor can be scheduled.

I can't encourage you enough to take advantage of what the LORD has provided you by way of help through your church. In this corrupt generation parents need all the help they can get.

3.

But now for the method outlined in our text for getting Christ into the hearts of our children. Follow along as I read the last verse of our text again: ***Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.***

What do these verses tell us? They tell us that bringing Christ into the hearts of our children is not to be confined only to the classroom, or only to a few minutes of listening to a family devotion. What they tell us is that parents are to bring the Word of God into daily life in a natural way. They are to help their children see how God's Word fits into every part of their lives. Parents are to inculcate the truths of the Bible into the hearts of their children by applying them to the everyday questions, concerns, and problems that arise during the course of the day. ***Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.***

Here's some examples ...

Let's say you're on a camping trip, and you're sitting down for breakfast on a bright, beautiful morning. Dad might say: "Look at the beautiful world God made for us to enjoy. Don't we have an awesome God. Isn't it good to be out in His creation!" An impression will be made.

Or if there is an argument in the family, parents can talk about how Jesus loves and forgives us, and how His love and forgiveness help the members of the family to forgive and love one another.

Money is a topic that often comes up in a family. Maybe the money is tight, but parents can explain to their children that we don't have to worry because our Heavenly Father has promised to take care of us.

Or when our children are blessed with a little extra cash in their pockets, it gives parents the opportunity to talk about how God wants us to use our money, the reason we want to give a portion of our income back to Him, and what our offerings are used for.

Or, when it comes to doing chores, parents can explain that everything we do can be done to God's glory, and how when we do our chores for Jesus even the simplest job becomes fulfilling.

Or if there's a death in the family, all that the children have learned about Jesus and eternal life for His believers can be brought home in a tangible and meaningful way.

This approach to Christian education is very exciting and rewarding. It's exciting when children understand that God is intimately involved in a very real and wonderful way in every aspect of their lives. It's rewarding when children see that Jesus is truly alive in their lives.

But what happens, I'm afraid, is that parents can often give the impression that there's church truth and then there's real life truth, as if the two don't go together. That church truth is just something we hear on Sundays, but the rest of the week we live by other principles, other values. We need to teach our children that Jesus is Life—Life Now and Life Forever— that He is the Lord of every part of their lives.

Now every Christian father and mother, if he or she is honest, knows that they have failed to be the kind of parent the LORD wants them to be. It's such a huge responsibility, and we seem so inadequate for the task. But just as Jesus loves our children, so He loves all Christian mothers and fathers. Every day the Savior warmly invites you parents to His cross. There we see how our many sins and shortcomings as parents were atoned for by the shedding of Jesus' blood. Our biting words directed at our children, our failure to discipline them as we ought, our failure to faithfully put their hand in Jesus' hand, have all been nailed to His cross and removed from God's sight forever. God loves you parents. He is there to forgive you and to help you rededicate yourself to getting Christ into the hearts of your sons and daughters.

Finally, parents, ask yourself what do you ultimately want for your children? Don't you want to one day be in Heaven with them? Isn't that what a Christian upbringing is finally all about? What will it matter if your child gains the whole world but his eternal soul is lost in the process? One day all his sports trophies, all her academic awards, all their future job successes, things that mean so much now, won't mean anything at all. The only thing that will matter is Christ placing the crown of everlasting life upon their head—the crown Jesus won for them. Look at your son or daughter, and pray God keep that goal and objective for your children as your number one priority for them.

As for the rest of us, let's do whatever we can to help and support our parents in the blessed endeavor to keep Jesus and His Word in the hearts of our congregation's children. AMEN!

—**Pastor Michael Wilke**

Gethsemane Lutheran Church
Saginaw, MI