

Meditation “Nurturing Heroes”
Scripture Readings: Mark 10:13-16
Founders’ Sunday, May 22, 2022
Blythe Denham Kieffer, D. Min.
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Springfield, Illinois

Our scripture reading is Mark 10:13-16. Part of the mystery of the Christian faith is that the One who created us, the One who is beyond our understanding, became a child, joining us in our humanity, welcoming and blessing children in a culture where social norms excluded children, in a time when children were powerless, having no voice, rights or status. By including the children, Jesus made it possible for the women who had the responsibility for their care to also hear Jesus’ teaching and Jesus makes it quite clear to his disciples that the kingdom of God belongs to the children. Hear now the Word of God.

¹³ People were bringing children to Jesus in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to his disciples, “Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And Jesus took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. Amen.

The title of the meditation: Nurturing Heroes

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, who bends down to lift infants and who gathers children in your arms, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to You. Amen.

As we celebrate this milestone anniversary of the Westminster Cooperative Preschool, it is good to reflect on Jesus’ teaching about children. For fifty years Westminster Presbyterian Church has opened her doors and welcomed the children of the community. Providing a nursery school in 1971 was on the cutting edge of early childhood development and education. From the beginning, the school’s philosophy has been to nurture each child in an environment that fosters optimum development physically, emotionally, socially, cognitively, and spiritually. Although not religious in nature, being based in a church was important to our founders and over the years many young families have found a church home at Westminster through their involvement in the preschool. We welcome families of all faith communities as we celebrate the beauty and diversity in each of God’s children.

By providing a safe place with healthy boundaries, young children at our cooperative preschool thrive, grow, and wonder together as they explore God’s world. By learning to share and to wait one’s turn, by practicing the manners of saying please and thank you, young children begin to learn delayed gratification and respect for others ...essential life tools! The cooperative nature of the preschool honors the primary caregivers role and presence in a young child’s first learning experiences.

Fifty years ago, this month the first class of 29 “shining stars” completed the initial year of preschool in our midst. Over these 50 years, our preschool has provided a strong start in the lives of over 1500 ‘shining stars.” Our hope and prayer for each shining star is that the

cultivation they receive here continues through the years nurturing heroes of faith and champions of kindness, generosity, and thoughtful leadership.

Psychologist Lisa Miller reminds us of the importance of nurturing spirituality and reverence within our children in her New York Times Bestseller, *The Spiritual Child*. Spirituality is defined as a personal relationship to a higher power such as God, nature, spirit, or the universe that is loving and guiding. Spirituality goes beyond religious creeds and is present among people of all faiths. Nurturing spirituality within our children prepares them for the important inner work required during their teen years in developing identity, character, and emotional resilience.

In George Conway's book, Giving Good Gifts, he talks about the superpowers and spiritual gifts we can give to our children as parents. One of them is the gift of "timshel," a derivative of the Hebrew phrase "Thou Mayest, which captures the biblical teaching that within us is a good greater than any evil in the world. Timshel is the ability to choose good over evil. This reservoir of spiritual power in overcoming evil is indispensable for their spiritual health.

Timshel, a reservoir of spiritual strength and health, is important for the hero in each one of us as we navigate the unexpected in life. The strength of knowing who we are and to whom we belong is imperative when we confront insults, hardships, persecutions, and giants along the way. The strength of knowing who we are and to whom we belong sustains us as it did the heroes we are about to meet, Moses, Deborah, Elijah, and David.

This same spiritual strength sustained the 30 ardent abolitionists who founded this congregation in 1835. This same strength sustained the parents whose vision and initiative created our cooperative preschool in 1971, and this same strength sustains each and every shining star who finds nurture and a strong start to life within our doors.

And Jesus said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. So be it. Amen.