

**“Behold, Our Children” Jer. 31:31-34, Luke 18:15-17**  
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**San Dimas Community, United Church**

Today we have beheld our children and seen in them the glory of God. Every child born, every boy or girl baptized, every young person who sings or dances draws us into the circle of God’s love in unique and moving ways. So much of our hopes and dreams are caught up in our children. So much of our angst and joys, prayers and attention for our children consumes our days. The investment of heart and soul in the lives of these little ones who grow ever so quickly is a great investment of ourselves. And since this is so, it is important to ask what our faith compels us to do and to be as we behold our children and all children of the world.

The Jeremiah text so beautifully speaks of a new relationship between God and God’s people. It tells the promise that all will *know God* from the least to the greatest. God will be on their hearts, like sutures after surgery. This new covenant will be one based not on laws written on paper but a covenant of words written on hearts. And as the heart is absolutely necessary for the body to exist, God becomes absolutely necessary for spiritual life to exist. Jeremiah says we will know God in the most personal, intimate ways human beings are capable of knowing. And like a child can melt our hearts and open us to giving and receiving love; God’s Spirit helps opens us to receive a new covenant, a new creation, and new life.

When Jesus lived children were seen but not heard. They were low on the social order. So it was a radical action for Jesus to insist that children be brought to him. It was a social role reversal for Jesus to say, “be like this child.” It was a new word from God for Jesus to say, “When you welcome a child, you welcome me.” So if we pay attention to these words of Jesus, we know that the way we treat children really matters to God. Our lives are judged by how we “behold our children.”

If Jesus beholds children in such high esteem, then how is it that 14 million children in our country live in poverty? Why is it that programs for keeping kids healthy are often up for budget cuts? Why does education take hit after hit when tax dollars decrease? The schools in Claremont where we live are considered some of the best in the area, and yet, year after year they receive less money and programs are cut. I’m glad our girls graduated in the previous decade, and I’m willing to pay more to give to other kids what my own children received. I believe teachers are often the most undervalued and underpaid professionals doing the most important work anyone can do. To teach children is a calling and a ministry.

Today we can recommit ourselves to follow Jesus more faithfully by beholding our children and by seeing them as symbols of God’s realm on earth. We can honor God by honoring our children and those who care for them and teach them. We can be faithful by supporting parents of children who often work full-time jobs and come home tired but committed to nurturing their children, helping them learn, guiding their growth. As God’s love is written on our hearts, we, too, can write on the hearts of our children God’s love for them.

If, at times, this task feels overwhelming, I would invite us to recall these words written by Marian Wright Edelman, an advocate for children today in our lifetime:

God did not call us to succeed, God called us to serve.

God did not call us to win, God called us to work.

God did not call us to live long, God called us to live for God.

God did not call us to be happy, God called us to be hopeful.  
God did not call us to fame, God called us to faith.  
God did not call us to seek power, God called us to seek peace.  
God did not call us to loot the earth and each other, God called us to love our earth and each other.

Why are we here if not to give our all to God, to what God has written on our hearts. To know God is to behold God's glory in each and every child. For Jews the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, is their precious text. Jewish tradition recounts this story:

When Israel stood to receive the Torah (the Bible's first five books),  
The Holy One, blessed be He said to them:  
I am giving you my Torah.  
Bring me good guarantors that you will guard it, and I shall give it to you.  
They said: Our fathers are our guarantors.  
The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them:  
Your fathers are unacceptable to me.  
Yet bring me good guarantors, and I shall give it to you.  
They said to him: Master of the Universe,  
Our prophets are our guarantors.  
He said to them: Your prophets are unacceptable to me.  
Yet bring me good guarantors, and I shall give it to you.  
They said: Behold, our children are our guarantors.  
The Holy One, blessed be He, said:  
They are certainly good guarantors.  
For their sake, I give you the Torah.

If the word of God has been written on your hearts, may you go forth to love, serve, and seek justice for the sake of all God's children. For God does not take us *from* the world, but sends us *into* the world to serve all humankind. As we leave this place our worship continues--outside these walls whenever we stand on behalf of all people and especially our children. Our cries for help and our songs of praise are never for ourselves alone. Worship is no retreat from the world; it is a time to discern what God is doing in the world and joining in that work.

So now may the God who watches over us, the God who came for us, and the God who works through us, guide all of us as beloved children today and forevermore. AMEN