

“Hide and Seek”
Preached by Rev. Carol Reynolds
July 3, 2011

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 Reflection
First Congregational Church, UCC, Cadillac, MI
For Private Distribution Only

Today is a significant day in the life of the McCann family and of this, their extended church family. In just a little while we will covenant with one another, with Michael and Lynn, and with Jack and Will. As parents and congregation, we will promise to nurture and cherish these little boys, to embrace them as the beloved children of God they have been since birth ...and will remain throughout their lives. We will covenant to provide a Christian community in which they might live into the baptismal promises their parents will make on their behalf. That is, we will vow to provide a home base where Jack and Will can learn the sacred stories of our faith, a community where, through and among us, they can experience the love of God and neighbor; a community where they can practice this love for themselves; and where, as they mature, they can seek, articulate, and embody *their own* beliefs and ministries, whatever those might be. Today, with words and water and touch, we recognize and dedicate them as children of divine blessing and promise. We pray that, like Jesus and John, they will grow into faithful men of God. And we realize that, twins or not, like cousins Jesus and John, their styles and personalities are wholly unique, and so, we anticipate, will be their paths.

As we enter into this baptismal covenant this morning, we may make an assumption that, based upon our combined years of accumulated wisdom and practical knowledge, maturity and experience, the onus is primarily on us. After all, today it is we adults who are solidifying pledges to be loving, responsible, faithful parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, teachers, and spiritual mentors to these little ones. It is we who are naming and affirming the omnipresence of God's unconditional love and grace in Will's and Jack's lives. It is we, individually and in community,

who are pledging to be the conduits and the mirrors of that love and grace... These are indeed *solemn* promises. They represent *a great deal* of responsibility. In fact, they may even feel a bit overwhelming on top of the heavy burdens many of us already carry in our day to day lives.

And yet, this is July 4th weekend, and so we are keenly aware of the admirable American qualities of independence and self-reliance that we possess. Our roots and shoots, from the Pilgrims, the Boston Tea Party, the Revolution, and the Western frontier, to men on the moon and the Space Shuttle,...they tell us we can do anything, anything at all *if we set our minds to it*. Not even *the sky* is the limit. We've got bootstraps, and we're prepared to use them. If we and our ancestors could accomplish all of this and more, then *surely* we are *perfectly* prepared to teach and model discipleship to our children. No sweat.

By now we know that Jesus is always turning things upside down, and today's scripture reading is no exception. While we seek wisdom in our own experienced, educated adult minds, Jesus says, "I thank you, God..., because you have *hidden* these things from the wise and the intelligent and have *revealed* them to infants..." ...Slow down, take a deep breath, and observe the little ones, the guileless ones who have only recently come to us from the very heart of God. What do they have to say to us about humility, interdependence and trust, about wonder and joy, about the little things, which actually point to the big things, about embracing humor and play, mystery and paradox, about knowing one another and God with our hearts first...and then our minds, about being open and just beyond cynicism's reach? Can we let these children be *our* teachers first? Can we seek to restore our beginner hearts and minds? What would our world be like, if we could all do *just that*?

Nevertheless, the reality is that we adults are no longer young or naïve. Each of us has experienced our own version of heartache, illness, and loss. We know that challenge awaits all of us at some point in our lives. We know how difficult it can be some days to maintain the freshness of newborns or the eagerness of toddlers. And that is just the time we will want to remember our own baptisms--the abundant comfort, grace and love the Holy Spirit offers to us every bit as much as to these little ones, the promise Jesus extends to us in today's reading:

²⁸Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

We know that discipleship and life in Christian community are by their very nature, challenging, which makes the promise of an easy yoke and a light burden a bit counterintuitive at best. Yet the offer Jesus makes here is to *share* the yoke with us, to *lighten* our burdens by allowing and encouraging us to lean on him, and on one another as a beloved community of faith. And, truth be told, many of the responsibilities we take on as church members and disciples contain their own rewards, and thus may be far lighter than we might first have imagined. How much wisdom, earnest or humorous, have we received out of the mouths of babes in Children's Time or coffee hour? How much infectious joy and laughter? How much energy and imagination? How much blessing and promise?

And so, as we embark upon this sacred covenant with God, and with Jack and Will, I pray that we may be every bit the blessing to these boys that they and all of our little ones are to us and that we may all experience the easy yoke and the light burden Jesus has graciously offered to us. Amen.