

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 11 April

Children's Talk: Spiritual Curiosity

One of the fun things about being a child is that people do a lot of things for you. You don't have to find your own food, or earn your own money, or drive yourself to where you need to go, or choose where you are going to live. But one of the fun things about getting older is that you get to start doing things for yourself. It is satisfying when you realize you can read on your own, or you can make a snack for yourself, or you can choose what to do with your time.

One of the things that other people do for you when you are young is to teach you. Your parents tell you what you need to know at home, and your teachers tell you what you need to learn at school. That's a good thing, because adults know much more than children, and so they have a good idea about what you need to learn.

But sometimes it can become easy to think that because adults are doing it for you, you don't have to do anything, and that is not the case at all! You need to have your own curiosity. Curiosity means wanting to know things that you don't already know. And I know that all of you are very curious: you want to know how things work, and why things are the way they are. You always ask, "why?" and that is a very important question.

It's especially important that you are curious about spiritual things: why did the Lord make me? How can I do the right thing? What matters most? How can I get to heaven? Why is life hard sometimes? Adults of course try to teach you these things; but it's also important that you also try to learn, with that curiosity that the Lord gave you. The Lord tells us to keep asking Him and looking for answers from Him:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

If we want to learn and grow, we need to keep putting effort into it! We can't expect adults to do all the work.

For you younger ones, this is very easy. But as you get older, your curiosity can fade. You can start to wonder if some questions are bad questions. It starts to feel like not knowing something about the Lord or what is right might make you a bad person. But if you stop your spiritual curiosity, how will you learn? That's like if you want something, but not being willing to ask for it; or having lost something, and wanting to find it, but not going around looking for it; or standing at a door, wishing someone would open it, but not knocking.

The Lord made you not knowing much, so that you could choose to learn and grow, and even love that growth. Don't wait for an adult to tell you what to learn. Ask those questions about how to do what is good, how to make the world a better place, how to be useful, how to change the world, and how to know the Lord. Unless you ask, you will not receive.

Education, Part 1: The Necessity of Education

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

11 April, 2021

Why do we educate children? We take it as a given that at a certain age, a child will be sent off to school, to work his way through pre-primary, primary, and high school, and then if available, university. Some will even go on to honours, masters, and doctoral degrees. I'd wager that all of you have gone through at least some of that process yourself. What was the point? Certainly there are plenty of teenagers who would rather not have to go to school ever again. The simple, secular answer is that education is necessary to prepare for a good job. And there is some truth to that. But the importance, really the necessity of education from a young age, is rooted in spiritual principles. This sermon is not just for those of you with young kids either. All of us have an obligation to contribute to the spiritual wellbeing of the next generation, to pass onto them our heritage from the Lord, and to ensure that as we have freely received, we also freely give in turn.

There are many things about human nature that we take for granted. This is especially true if you grew up in a good family, supported by a loving and kind community, and have had the good fortune to work with and come to know good people. We are so used to the way things are that we forget that they could be otherwise. But at any one time we are only one generation away from ignorance, selfishness, and cruelty. No matter how far along we have come as a society, no matter how much we have grown through decades and centuries, no matter how instilled we are with values and principles, one lost generation is all it would take to go back to square one. Success in one generation does not automatically transfer to the following one.

We see a reflection of this truth in certain commands given to the Children of Israel. The context is that the current generation had seen the miracles that the Lord had performed in bringing them out of Egypt, and in descending onto Mt. Sinai to give them the Ten Commandments; but the next generation would not have seen these miracles, and so the obligation fell to them to diligently teach their children about the Lord and His commandments. This is Moses speaking to the Children of Israel:

Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your children's children, *especially* the day you stood before Jehovah your God in Horeb, when Jehovah said to me, "Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.'

"Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. ¹² And Jehovah spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; *you only heard* a voice. ¹³ So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. ¹⁴ And Jehovah commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess.
(Deuteronomy 4:9-14)

This passage draws attention not just to the need to pass on something to the next generation, but also what specifically is most important to pass on: the Commandments of the Lord, especially the Ten Commandments. The Children of Israel had seen and heard first-hand the power and importance of these Commandments. They knew from experience that success only came when they followed these rules of life. And so it was incumbent on them to pass these commandments, and not just the commandments, but their personal experience of their power when followed, on to their children and their children's children. This is how they could set their children up for success when they entered the Land of Canaan.

This same obligation is incumbent on us. Again, we are always one generation away from returning to square one, not just in terms of raw information and technical skills, but also in terms of spiritual well-being. If we have learned the teachings that the Lord gives us, and especially if we have seen their power when lived, it is incumbent on us to pass that on to the generation that is coming up after us, lest they be left back at square one spiritually.

The most obvious way to fulfil this obligation is through parenthood. Parents teach their children to know the Lord, to follow Him, to build a conscience, and to live well. Preparing a child to be a moral and spiritual person is the greatest gift that parents can give to their children. But this obligation is broader than just parenthood, and in part that is why this sermon is directed at all of us: this message is not just for parents. We can all be part of passing on spiritual truths to the next generation.

One example is the work that happens in Kainon School, which we as a church run. Day in and day out, children are taught about the Lord, His Word, His teachings, and His presence in all aspects of creation and life. More than that though every day they are given living experiences of His presence. Remember that the command is not simply to convey information, but to convey an experience of God's power and love. Every child who attends a New Church school should be given the opportunity to see the Lord's teachings in practice, to receive encouragement to practice those teachings themselves, and know from lived experience that they are loved and can in turn love others.

Nor is this practice restricted to family and school environments. One passage of the Word describes it as an education that should be ongoing, at all times:

Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 11:18-20)

All of us, in whatever capacity, can pass on the Lord's words to the next generation. Many of us may feel awkward in this position. We tend to be reticent, and I know that I am guilty of this myself. It's hard to take the vulnerable, personal experiences of how the Lord has led, guided us, and changed us, and openly share those ideas with others. But think of the benefit that we can give to others, especially by sharing our lived experience of what the Lord can do. Anyone can learn about the Lord from books and sermons; but when they hear from someone they look up to and admire

how the Lord has been a part of their life, faith can come alive. Let your light shine; you have wisdom and experience to pass on that no one else is able to.

We do not just teach by our words. We also set an example, especially for those who are younger. Even if you are only a young adult, the youngsters are watching you, learning from you. You might not feel like you are equipped to be showing anyone else the way to best follow the Lord, but whether you like it or not that is one of the roles you have. I remember how as a preteen, anyone out of high school seemed like a fully-fledged adult. It's not just children and teens though. For those who are middle-aged, the young adults look to your example, and to the example of you who are elders. We all are continuously learning, and we learn the most from the people around us. If you look at your life, how you carry yourself, how you talk, the things you prioritize or focus on, what lesson are you teaching about the Lord? How are others learning what it means to be part of the church from you? We all have that responsibility, not just people in educational positions.

The need for people to continuously be educated, generation after generation, can seem like an inconvenience. We might become despondent over having to cover the exact same ground over and over, or feel hopelessness over how tenuous the future of the church appears. It would seem more stable if we were born with certain instincts that led us to know exactly what is good or evil, and to be born preferring the good and rejecting the evil by our very nature, much as animals are led by their natural instincts. But in actual fact, the ignorance and self-centredness of humanity at birth becomes our strength.

[O]ur imperfection at birth becomes our perfection, while an animal's perfection at birth becomes its imperfection....

We are born without any knowledge so that we can come into all knowledge, make progress in understanding, and move onward into wisdom. We are born without any love so that by intelligently applying what we learn we can come into all love, can come to love God through loving our neighbour, and can thereby develop a partnership with God that makes us truly human and allows us to live forever. (*True Christian Religion* §48:8, 15)

The image that this passage creates in my mind is that of a small bucket full to the brim compared to an empty bucket that has infinite potential to be filled. The very emptiness of the human mind at birth, the very need to learn through effort and at times painful life-experience is what allows us as human to grow into the image and likeness of God, with minds and hearts that can be expanded to eternity.

The point of education then is not to reach a certain goal. The point is to grow towards a certain way of life, in a relationship with others and with the Lord. To the extent education is focused on what job a child can get or what grade level they can achieve, and is taken to end when schooling ends, it is a sorely limited view of education. Education is truly New Church when it is seen as sharing truth from the Lord, so that it can be lived and so that it can be used to serve others, in a process lasting to eternity. New Church education is a process that we all can participate as we spiritually uplift those following behind us, and its success is in generation after generation, once again turning to the Lord and doing His will.