

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost. The scripture text is taken from Matthew 11:7-27

Imagine, that you hear the roar of car engine outside of your door. As you look out, you see a red sports car, which happens to be a convertible. And sitting in the driver's seat is a young man with long flowing hair, and mirrored sunglasses.

You can see that he is well tanned, because he doesn't have a shirt on, just shorts, and flip-flops. You can also see that he has tattoos on his chest and arms, he his ears pierced. He puts a beer into the cup holder of the car as he shuts off the engine.

But there is a passenger in the car as well. She is wearing a halter top and shorts, and not much else, you know her, because everyone in town knows her.

People enjoy gossiping about her latest escapades. But leaving the woman in the car, the young man, hops out of the car and comes to your door. When you open the door, he introduces himself as the new pastor of your church.

So, you decide to find a church somewhere else. You go to one down the road, you have heard about this pastor, he is very conservative, and very serious. He always wears black, and is never seen without his King James Bible in hand.

He isn't married, doesn't have a girlfriend. And for some reason, most of his sermons, seem to center on avoiding hell's fire and brimstone. Anyone who likes to drink, is looked down on.

There are very few smiles in this church, and most everyone there, agrees that the world is a pretty rotten, sinful, and awful place. So you quickly decide this pastor won't meet your needs anymore than the other pastor, so you go church-shopping, for a church that will satisfy you, in the end, you never find one.

Ok, so I know these are two extreme examples. But I have tried to put this into a modern day context, so that you get the idea, as to how the people of Jesus day, saw Jesus and John the Baptist.

I think that it is safe to safe, that some folks in Jesus' day, saw Him as a party-animal. He drank too much, hung out with the wrong crowd so to speak. He was always around the tax-collectors, the prostitutes, and other notorious sinners, those on the fringe, and it did not matter, that He was trying to reach out to them, and to bring them to God.

Jesus was wild and seemed, not to fit the picture of someone who was supposed to be from God. He did not follow the accepted standards of righteousness. This Jesus was out of control.

Now on the other hand, there was John the Baptist. He was a wild man, but in a different way. People thought he was crazy, to the point that he must have a demon.

He was always yelling when he preached, he looked wild-eyed, and was dressed in a garment of camel's hair, he ate grasshoppers and wild-honey. His dress and diet would have driven a normal person insane.

His demeanor was dark and demanding. He was calling even the self-righteous Pharisees to repentance, John the Baptist had no use for their hypocrisy.

He sounded like one of the Old Testament prophets, talking about the coming judgment, in other words God's a coming and He Ain't Happy!

Get it together people, turn it around, turn to God or face the consequences. So they wrote him off, as some kind of extremist, some kind of nut, or some kind of radical.

The people of Jesus' day, didn't like the message and the methods of either Jesus or John the Baptist. Jesus said the people (the adults) were like children playing a game.

These games that Jesus made reference too, are unknown to us, but well known to the people of the day.

These games were probably games in which children played or were acting out adult ceremonies, like weddings or funerals.

Perhaps one group of children would call to another group to play a game, someone played a wedding song on a flute and the others would not play or dance. Or perhaps they would sing a funeral dirge and they would not play like mourners in that game either.

Nothing they tried would work, to engage the other group to play with them. Nothing would satisfy them.

The point of what Jesus was saying was that God had sent them every different kind of messenger, but none would do.

God had sent His prophets with a funeral dirge and a warning of death and destruction, if they did not mourn with repentance, and turn back to God, but they did not respond.

God had called them with the joyful wedding song that Jesus played, but they did not want to dance. They refused to come to the party.

It was like the prodigal son, who wanted to leave his father's house, because it was too restrictive and boring.

But his older brother, refused to come to the party his father threw, and stayed outside, sullen and angry.

Jesus said that it was not the messenger, that was the problem, the problem was their stubborn, unbelief. They would not believe that God had sent anyone, including His only Son. And to this day, not all, but most Jews do not believe that Jesus was the Messiah of God, but that He was just a good person who did good things while He lived.

They would not mourn, neither would they dance. They refused to be a part of the party that God was throwing. John the Baptist was too holy for them, and Jesus, well, He wasn't holy enough. And in the end, both John the Baptist and Jesus both met very violent deaths.

And folks, it was not just the religious leaders, but it was most of the common people of the day, who rejected Jesus was well.

For example, Jesus had lived among the people in the towns of Capernaum, and Bethsaida. Jesus ministered to them, and taught them. He performed miracles and healing. He fed them with bread

that came from a miracle, just as God had fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna and quail, but nothing really seemed to work.

They were still hardened in their unbelief. So the Bible says that (this is starting in verse 20) Jesus said: "Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you on that day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you." (verses 20 through 24)

Those are some pretty strong words for the people of Israel. Who was worse than Tyre and Sidon, with their savage warfare and cruelty?

Who was worse than Sodom and Gomorrah in their sin of homosexuality? To say that it would go better at the judgment with them, than Israel was shocking indeed.

It would be like saying, that it would be better at the judgment with the Nazis, than for America. It would be like saying, that it would go better for an atheistic communist country, like the former Soviet Union, than for America.

For America has had its share of Billy Grahams and other great evangelists, who have called people to repentance and yet remains steadfast in its sin and unbelief for the most part.

Perhaps if these countries had, the privilege of having the gospel preached in them, the way we have, they would have repented in sack-cloth and ashes, and a lasting revival would have broken out.

But then Jesus said in verse 25: "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

These children are not the same ones He spoke of earlier. Earlier, Jesus was actually speaking about adults who acted like children, who were bored and impossible to please.

But these children are true children, children who are playful and full of wonder and awe. They believe easily and naturally. They are simple, innocent and open. It is to these that God has chosen to reveal Himself.

The religious leaders of Jesus day, claimed that, by only studying the Torah, one could gain wisdom, insight, and as a result, one could come to know God. But this way of doing it, was on an intellectual level and it took years of study.

It was called, "The yoke of the Torah", and it was a heavy yoke. However, the religious leaders, rejected the easy yoke or the light burden that Jesus spoke of.

The religious leaders knew the entire Old Testament, they had it memorized, they studied the great teachers of scripture. The religious leaders had formed extremely complex forms of thought.

But Jesus made it very clear, that in all their wisdom, they missed the obvious. Jesus said that God had hidden His truth from the wise and revealed it to children.

It made God happy. Children get the obvious. That is why, when we read in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 18, verses 1-4, he writes: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

The greatest truth and wisdom is hidden from many of those who are the philosophers, scholars, and the scientists of our age. The Word of God tells us, (this is from the Book of James, chapter 4 verse 6): "But he gives all the more grace, therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Jesus is saying to us; that we are to be humble, simple, innocent and open, we are to be "child-like" in our life and walk of faith.

You know, there are people in our society today, who are highly educated, yet some have bought into the different philosophies, of humanism, skepticism, and whatever "ism", that they think makes them so smart, so intelligent, that doubt is realism and faith is fantasy. Life is a confusing mess for them, and life just goes in circles.

As a believer, regardless of your education level, that's not how God calls us to live. God does not want our lives going in circles, the non-believer, lives his or her life, going in circles.

God calls us to total dependency and trust, there is no, "going in circles". What Jesus is wanting us to learn here today, is that the faith of a child is one of total trust and dependency. We are to have a child-like faith.

So whether a child is whiny or full of laughter, the child is still totally dependent upon the parents. For those of us who are parents you know what I am talking about.

Children put their trust in their parents. It is this total dependency and trust that children have for their parents, that we as adults, would be wise to do, as we live our lives walking in faith with Christ.

But Pastor, how do we do this? By admitting our need for God, instead of ourselves. It is about admitting that God is my Father in Heaven and that I will trust in Him all the more regardless of life's circumstances, and that through that trust, I know I will have peace and security, for God's Word tells me so. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, By your grace, through faith, You have made yourself known to us in the person of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us we pray, that as we live in an ever-changing world, that we will put our faith and our trust in you all more, and rely on you, just as a child relies on his or her parents. Help us to be child-like in our faith, so as to grow in love and in faith toward You and one another. All these things we humbly pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

