

Isaiah 11:1-10
December 5, '10

“STOP ACTING YOUR AGE”

RIDICULOUS. PREPOSTEROUS. POPPYCOCK. NAÏVE. NEVER GONNA HAPPEN.
ALL OF THOSE ARE THOUGHTS THAT COME TO MIND AS WE READ THESE VERSES, AREN'T THEY?
FROM BEGINNING TO END, ISAIAH'S WORDS ARE THE NONSENSICAL DRIVEL OF A DREAMER.
YOU SEE THAT STUMP OF A DEAD TREE IN YOUR BACKYARD & YOU KNOW IT'S NOT COMING BACK TO
LIFE.

YOU KNOW THAT NATURAL ENEMIES LIKE WOLVES & LAMBS, LEOPARDS & GOATS, LIONS & CALVES WILL
NEVER SIT DOWN AT THE SAME DINNER TABLE – NOT WITHOUT ONE OF THEM BEING THE MEAL!

YOU KNOW THE DAY WILL NEVER COME WHEN A RESPONSIBLE PARENT WOULD LEAVE A CHILD
UNATTENDED NEXT TO A POISONOUS SNAKE.

WE READ THESE WORDS & IT'S EASY TO CONCLUDE THEY ARE LITTLE MORE THAN THE NONSENSICAL
DRIVEL OF A DREAMER.

A DREAMER – YES.

NONSENSICAL DRIVEL – NOT AT ALL.

NOT IF WE'RE WILLING TO LOOK AT THESE WORDS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MAIN ELEMENT
THAT WE FIND WITHIN THEM – THAT OF THE YOUNG.

WE SEE THE LAMB & THE CALF.

WE SEE THE CHILD STILL SMALL ENOUGH TO BE NURSING & THE ONE JUST RECENTLY WEANED.

AND THEN WE HAVE THOSE WORDS THAT WE ASSOCIATE SO MUCH WITH THE SEASON OF ADVENT – “AND
A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.”

I THINK NEARLY ALL PARENTS & LEADERS OF CHILDREN HAVE – AT LEAST ON OCCASION – SAID TO A
CHILD, “START ACTING YOUR AGE.”

WHAT WE MEAN BY THAT, OF COURSE, IS THAT WE THINK A CHILD'S BEHAVIOR IS THAT OF A BOY OR
GIRL YOUNGER THAN HE OR SHE IS.

WE WANT THEM TO ACT MORE “GROWN UP” THAN THEY ARE.

I DOUBT THAT ANY OF YOU HAS EVER UTTERED THOSE WORDS WITH THE EXPECTATION THAT A CHILD
SHOULD BE ACTING *YOUNGER* THAN THEY ARE.

THE MESSAGE IS THAT OLDER IS BETTER.

WE SAY THINGS LIKE “*HOW MATURE SHE IS FOR HER AGE.*”

“*HE'S WISE BEYOND HIS YEARS.*”

I SAID SOMETHING IN A SERMON RECENTLY THAT I WAS VERY RELUCTANT TO SAY.

I PROCEEDED IN SAYING IT BECAUSE I THINK IT ADEQUATELY MADE A POINT.

YET IT STILL TROUBLED ME TO SAY IT BECAUSE – WHEN THINKING OF IT IN A DIFFERENT CONTEXT – I
DIDN'T AT ALL LIKE WHAT I WAS SAYING.

WHAT TROUBLED ME EVEN MORE WAS THAT NO ONE CALLED ME ON IT.
NO ONE WALKED OUT AFTER WORSHIP & SAID, “*YOU KNOW, THERE’S ANOTHER WAY OF LOOKING AT THAT.*”
NO ONE CALLED ME UP DURING THE WEEK & SAID, “*I’M NOT SURE I AGREE WITH YOU ABOUT THAT.*”
NO ONE WROTE A NOTE INDICATING THEY WANTED TO CHALLENGE MY THINKING ON THE MATTER.
I WAS TALKING ABOUT WANTING – AS A CHILD – TO GO OUTSIDE & JUMP IN PILES OF LEAVES RATHER
THAN SIT AROUND & TALK BUT AS I’VE GROWN OLDER, THOSE DESIRES HAVE REVERSED.

AGAIN, I THINK IT ADEQUATELY CONVEYED A POINT I WAS TRYING TO MAKE & PERHAPS THAT’S WHY
NONE OF YOU OBJECTED.

BUT IT TROUBLES ME TO THINK OF NOT WANTING TO JUMP IN A PILE OF LEAVES ANY LONGER.
IT TROUBLES ME TO THINK OF ALL THE CHILDLIKE ASPECTS OF LIFE THAT I’VE LEFT BEHIND.
LET’S BE CLEAR HERE.

I SAID “CHILDLIKE” – NOT “CHILDISH.”

YOU KNOW THE APOSTLE PAUL, IN HIS BEAUTIFUL WORDS ABOUT LOVE, SAYS, “*WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I
SPOKE LIKE A CHILD, I THOUGHT LIKE A CHILD, I REASONED LIKE A CHILD. WHEN I BECAME A MAN, I GAVE UP
CHILDISH WAYS.*”

YES - HE SAYS, CHILDISH, NOT CHILDLIKE.

AND I BELIEVE THERE’S A DIFFERENCE.

IF YOU’VE BEEN FOLLOWING YOUR ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET, ON FRIDAY YOU READ ABOUT
CLEMENT MOORE – AN INTELLECTUAL GIANT WHO WROTE A TWO-VOLUME LEXICON OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE
& ACCOMPLISHED EXTRAORDINARY THINGS IN HIS LIFETIME.

HIS LASTING LEGACY, THOUGH, IS “A VISIT FROM ST. NICHOLAS” – “’T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE
CHRISTMAS.”

C.S. LEWIS, ARGUABLY ONE OF THE GREATEST THEOLOGICAL THINKERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY IS BEST-
KNOWN FOR HIS “CHRONICLES OF NARNIA” SERIES FOR CHILDREN.

HERE ARE TWO EXTRAORDINARY MEN WHO NEVER LOST THEIR CHILDLIKE MIND & INTERESTS.

JESUS HIMSELF SAID THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE A LITTLE CHILD & THOSE WHO WISH TO ENTER
THAT KINGDOM MUST DO SO LIKE A CHILD.

I THINK THERE’S A REASON ISAIAH CENTERS THIS DREAM ABOUT A WORLD OF PEACE AROUND A CHILD.

IT TAKES THE VISION OF A CHILD TO BELIEVE THINGS THAT SEEM UTTERLY PREPOSTEROUS.

IT TAKES THE HEART OF CHILD TO BE FILLED WITH RAPTUROUS WONDER AT THE PROMISING
POSSIBILITIES THAT LIE BEFORE US.

IT TAKES THE FAITH OF A CHILD TO TRUST THAT, NO MATTER WHAT’S GOING ON RIGHT NOW, THERE’S A
BRIGHT FUTURE AROUND THE NEXT CORNER.

SO, IN A REVERSAL OF WHAT WE OFTEN SAY TO CHILDREN, LET ME CHALLENGE YOU TO “*STOP ACTING
YOUR AGE!*”

STOP BEING SO CYNICAL THAT YOU CAN'T BELIEVE A WORLD OF PEACE & HARMONY IS A REALISTIC POSSIBILITY.

STOP BEING SO DRIVEN THAT YOU CAN'T TAKE TIME TO ENJOY LIFE & MAYBE EVEN JUMP IN A PILE OF LEAVES.

STOP BEING SO CENTERED ON "STUFF" THAT YOU CAN'T ENJOY THE CHILDLIKE WONDER OF MERELY BEING ALIVE.

G. K. CHESTERTON, IN HIS CLASSIC WORK, ORTHODOXY, SAYS A MARVELOUS THING ABOUT THIS.

HE SAYS, "A CHILD OF SEVEN IS EXCITED BY BEING TOLD A TALE WHERE TOMMY OPENED A DOOR & SAW A DRAGON.

"BUT A CHILD OF THREE IS EXCITED BY BEING TOLD THAT TOMMY OPENED A DOOR!

"MERE LIFE IS INTERESTING ENOUGH!"

WOULD THAT WE ALL MIGHT RECAPTURE THAT WONDER OF CHILDHOOD WHERE "MERE LIFE IS INTERESTING ENOUGH!"

IN THAT SENSE, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO "STOP ACTING YOUR AGE."

I REMEMBER HEARING A SERMON MANY YEARS AGO THAT WAS DELIVERED BY A GREAT PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER, DR. BRUCE THIELMAN.

IT WAS AT A CONFERENCE FOR YOUTH & THERE WERE PROBABLY 2,000 TEEN-AGERS IN ATTENDANCE.

I RECALL DR. THIELMAN SAYING, "IF I COULD HAVE MY YOUTH TO LIVE OVER AGAIN, I'D SEE A LOT MORE SUNSETS & I'D BURN A LOT MORE RUBBER."

I DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE THAT WAS SAID IN THAT SERMON, BUT I'LL NEVER FORGET THOSE WORDS.

AS I REFLECT UPON THEM NOW, THOUGH, THEY HAVE A VERY DIFFERENT MEANING TO ME THAN THEY DID THEN.

AT THE TIME I HEARD THOSE WORDS, I WAS A YOUTH DIRECTOR – STILL IN COLLEGE.

WHAT THOSE WORDS SAID TO ME THEN WAS THAT I'D BETTER TAKE ADVANTAGE OF MY YOUTH BECAUSE IT WAS QUICKLY COMING TO AN END.

I'D BETTER ENJOY ALL THE LITTLE THINGS OF LIFE – SUNSETS & THE LIKE – THAT COULD MAKE ME SMILE.

AND I'D BETTER DO THE CRAZY THINGS – NOT DANGEROUS & IRRESPONSIBLE, BUT JUST FUN-LOVING – THE RUBBER – BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE.

WHEN I REFLECT ON THOSE WORDS NOW, THOUGH, I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHY THOSE THINGS HAVE TO COME TO AN END.

IN A RECENT EPISODE OF THE SITCOM "MODERN FAMILY," AS LITTLE MANNY IS ABOUT TO CELEBRATE HIS 9TH BIRTHDAY, HE REALIZES THAT HE'S NEVER REALLY BEEN A KID.

AFRAID THAT HE'S GOING COMPLETELY LOSE OUT ON CHILDHOOD, HE STARTS DOING THE THINGS HE'S SEEN HIS PEERS DO THAT HE'S NEVER DONE HIMSELF – MAKING PRANK PHONE CALLS, MIXING DIFFERENT SOFT DRINKS TOGETHER & CONNECTING 3 STRAWS TO MAKE ONE GIANT STRAW.

HE WANTS TO BE A CHILD WHILE THERE'S STILL TIME.

THESE WORDS OF ISAIAH TELL US THE TIME FOR MEANINGFUL CHILDLIKE BEHAVIOR NEVER ENDS.

THE TIME TO DREAM DREAMS OF A BETTER WORLD & A BETTER LIFE ARE NEVER OVER.

THESE WORDS TELL US TO HANG ON TO THE DREAM OF PEACE, BECAUSE IT'S A DREAM THAT WILL BECOME REALITY.

TWO DAYS FROM TODAY, WE'LL OBSERVE THE 69TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOMBING OF PEARL HARBOR. IN THE FIVE TUMULTOUS & TORTUROUS YEARS THAT FOLLOWED THAT EVENT, WHO WOULD HAVE DREAMED THAT WE WOULD EVER BE THE ALLIES WITH JAPAN, GERMANY & ITALY THAT WE ARE TODAY.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN CHILDLIKE TO EVEN SUGGEST SUCH A THING & YET IT'S A DREAM THAT'S COME TRUE.

THESE WORDS OF THE PROPHET SET BEFORE US A PICTURE OF AS DISPARATE A GROUP OF BEASTLY CREATURES AS WE CAN POSSIBLY IMAGINE.

IN THIS PICTURE HE PAINTS, THEY WILL BE TOGETHER IN PEACE & HARMONY.

AND WHO'S THE ONE HERDING THIS MESSY & MENACING MENAGERIE?

“AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM,” THE PROPHET SAYS.

ISAIAH OFFERED THE PEOPLE OF HIS TIME & HE OFFERS US, A DIFFERENT WORLD THAN THE ONE TO WHICH WE'VE GROWN ACCUSTOMED.

HE OFFERS US A WORLD THAT ISN'T LED BY SLICK, CRAFTY POLITICIANS OR TOUGH, HARDENED GENERALS.

HE OFFERS US A WORLD LED BY A LITTLE CHILD.

IT'S A PREPOSTEROUS NOTION – UNLESS YOU STOP ACTING YOUR AGE & BECOME MORE CHILDLIKE YOURSELF.

MARTIN LUTHER SAID, *“IT'S A RIDICULOUS THING THAT THE ONE TRUE GOD, THE HIGH MAJESTY OF THE UNIVERSE, SHOULD BE MADE HUMAN.”*

IT REALLY IS, ISN'T IT?

IN OUR SOPHISTICATED, GROWN-UP UNDERSTANDING OF THE WAY THE WORLD WORKS, IT MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL.

LUTHER GOES ON TO SAY, *WHO COULD EVER HAVE CONCEIVED THIS OR THOUGHT IT OUT? REASON WANTS TO CLIMB TO HEAVEN TO FATHOM THE DIVINE, BUT REASON MUST BOW & CONFESS HER IGNORANCE WHEN SHE CANNOT SEE WHAT LIES BEFORE HER EYES IN THE MANGER.”*

ISAIAH TELLS US THAT *“A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.”*

STANDING ON THIS SIDE OF THAT FIRST ADVENT, WE KNOW THAT HE DOES.

HE LEADS US FROM HIS CRIB IN BETHLEHEM RIGHT OUT INTO THE REAL WORLD OF WAR & TERRORISM,
A WORLD OF POVERTY & UNEMPLOYMENT.

HE LEADS US TO JERUSALEM & TO THE CROSS OF GOLGOTHA.

HE TAKES US TO THE PROMISE OF THE EMPTY TOMB – SOMETHING ELSE THAT’S FOOLISH, RIDICULOUS &
PREPOSTEROUS.

IT’S AS PREPOSTEROUS AS A LIVING BRANCH EMERGING FROM A DEAD STUMP.

WHERE ARE THE DEAD STUMPS IN *YOUR* LIFE?

ARE THEY NOT CENTERED, PERHAPS, IN YOUR UNWILLINGNESS TO MAINTAIN THE WONDER OF A
CHILDLIKE SPIRIT?

THERE WAS SOMETHING NEW & FRESH THAT EMERGED FROM THAT DEAD STUMP IN ISAIAH’S VISION.

“*STOP ACTING YOUR AGE*” & LET THAT FRESHNESS – THAT NEWNESS – THAT BRAND-NEW LIFE - THAT
CHILDLIKE PURITY & INNOCENCE & DESIRE TO DREAM OF A BETTER WORLD – FILL YOUR LIFE. AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*