**SERMON**

Isn’t it amazing what little children can do?

Perhaps it’s just grandparents who think so, but isn’t it astonishing what children can do, and see, and hear, and say?

Several years ago, an 18 wheeler was making its way up the motorway and the driver misjudged the height of his trailer while going underneath a bridge.

Sure enough; halfway through, the truck got stuck.

The officials argued for hours as to how to remove this rig. but then an eight-year-old boy suggested that they try letting the air out of the truck’s tires.

Now, why didn’t the experts think of that?

During a time of drought in an American farm town, citizens were asked to come to a prayer service for rain, and they were asked to bring a tangible expression of their faith.

One adult brought a bible, another brought a cross, and still another brought a picture of Jesus, walking on the water.

**But a little boy brought an umbrella...**

Why didn’t the adults think of that?

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus talks about yokes.

A yoke was a piece of wood that the farmer placed across the necks of oxen to enable them to work together to pull a plough.

The yoke spanned the necks of two oxen so they could combine their pulling power.

And a lot depended on the yoke.  A too-heavy yoke would add to the burden.

A badly fitted yoke would rub the oxen's necks raw.

 Some carpenters had a special talent for making yokes.

I’m sure, if it could, the ox would pray for a yoke-maker who would take the time to fit the yoke well - who would polish the wood - who would sand the splinters.

Joseph was a carpenter.  He would have begun teaching Jesus the art of carpentry as soon as Jesus was old enough to hold a tool.  As Jesus grew, he would learn a little more each day.  At some point, Jesus, too, would become a master carpenter.

In our scripture today, Jesus spoke of yokes for people - not oxen.  He said:

**"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavily burdened,**

**and I will give you rest.**

**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,**

**for I am gentle and lowly in heart,**

**and you will find rest for your souls.**

**For my yoke is easy,**

**and my burden is light" (vv. 28-30).**

The rabbis sometimes spoke of God's law as a yoke for people to bear.  God intended the law to be comfortable, and some people found it so.  The psalmist said:

**"Yahweh's law is perfect, restoring the soul.**

**Yahweh's testimony is sure, making wise the simple....**

**Yahweh's ordinances are true,**

**and righteous altogether" (Psalm 19:7, 9b).**

The Psalmist meant that we could trust God's law.  He meant that God's law is a faithful guide.  He meant that even a not-very-bright person could get along by following God's law.

But in the hands of the rabbis, the laws had become a heavy burden.

* The rabbis took a simple law, such as "Don't work on the Sabbath" -and, by the time they were through with it, you needed a Ph.D. to figure out what you could and couldn't do.
* The rabbis wrote one big book after another explaining every jot and tittle of the law.  They said, "You have to KNOW all these things to keep God's law.  You have to DO all these things to keep God happy."

And the people despaired because nobody could do all those things.

But if the rabbis had a talent for making life complicated, Jesus had a talent for making it simple.

The rabbis said, **"You have to know everything in these books we have written.**

But Jesus said:

**"Whatever you desire for men to do to you,**

**you shall also do to them;**

**for this is the law and the prophets"** (Matthew 7:12).

 **How could it get simpler than that!**

When a lawyer asked Jesus “what was the most important commandment”, he said that there are two important commandments.

**“LOVE GOD and  LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.**

The whole law and the prophets

depend on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:40).

If children can understand how this offer is a wonderful gift to sinners, then I wonder why we adult sinners are so stubborn about hanging on to the garbage of the past.

* **Why do we have such difficulty grasping a simple thing called “forgiveness”?**
* **Imagine how different the world would be, instead of harbouring resentment and anger at our enemies, we just decided to forgive them.**
* **Imagine how different the church would look if we stopped carrying grudges from previous generations.**
* **Imagine for a moment how the political landscape would change if candidates refused to attack one another and instead, had simple conversations as to what each would do to make this a better nation.**
* **Imagine how peaceful life would be if we accepted unique and diverse people for the way they are, instead of being cruel to them until they become like us.**

These are the natural qualities of children.

And I believe this is, in part, what Jesus had in mind when he said that we must become like children.

But instead, we raise children to become like us;

judgmental, self-centred, sometimes hurtful, often angry,

**and always right.**

And perhaps Jesus looks down on us and wonders,

“What don’t they understand about **love and grace?”**

Sometimes Children ask deep and difficult questions.

I remember one occasion in Extreme, our older Tygre Group Club, a young girl asked:

**If I stopped loving GOD, would he stop loving ME?**

How do you answer that? Naturally it started quite a long and fruitful discussion.

A paster described the event of the death of one of his parishioners. He said:

‘Twenty-eight years ago, while I was on internship at this church, Glenn Carlsen died.

Our son was four at the time, and we debated whether or not to take him to the funeral, **but he loved Glenn,** so we decided to bring him.

That night, as we knelt to say prayers, this is what Kyle prayed:

**“Dear God; I am glad that Glenn is with you,**

**but I’m sad because I will miss him.” ‘**

So childlike. So simple. And so honest.

* How do we come to see life with fresh eyes like that?
* How do we get in the loop and understand things that make perfect sense to the simplest of minds, yet confound the wisest and most intelligent people of this world?

 “Jesus said,

**‘Unless you become like children,**

**you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”**
AMEN.