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**A: Pentecost 6
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

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“The Secret of Infants and Oxen”

Have you ever put something important in a safe place and then forgotten where that is?
I’ve done that more often than I care to remember, but one time in particular stands out.

I think Conner must have been about 7 or 8 at the time.
I don’t remember what he did, but I told him that if he did it again,
I would take away his new cutting-edge technology – a camera plugged into his computer.
Whatever it was that he had done, he did it again,
and I took that new computer camera away and hid it.
I had told him he had lost it for a week, and at the end of the week he asked for it back.
The thing was, I couldn’t remember where I put it!
I looked all over; he looked all over; we all looked all over, but we couldn’t find it –
not until something like 5 or 6 years later – when the technology was completely out of date.

I had hidden something away in a secret place.
And then I had forgotten where it was and I couldn’t find it again.

Whether or not, we’ve done that kind of thing with a physical object,
I think all of us human beings do it on another level.
We come into this world with a great gift, a great treasure, that gives us great joy.
But somehow, over the course of time, we put it away somewhere, and are unable to find it.

In our gospel today, Jesus says that there is a secret to life –
a secret that children are born knowing, but over the years forget.
That’s what Jesus is talking about in our gospel for today when he says,
*“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...” [Mt 11:25]*

In order to figure out what that secret is that we’ve lost, I’m going to ask you to help me
make a list of the qualities that children possess that seem to disappear as we age.
So what are those qualities in children that delight us and bring us joy?

Children: Adults

So, as we look at these lists, let me read again, Jesus ‘s words,
*“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...” [Mt 11:25]*

Back when I was depressed & looking for joy, I was told that I had to submit my will to God’s.
I wasn’t quite sure what that meant, and to be honest, I’m still learning.
But I have learned two essential things:

First, that any control I ever thought I had over my own life was a delusion.
Any independence I thought I had was an illusion.
Because in fact, I AM totally and completely and absolutely dependent on God,
not in some theoretical way, but in a very real and practical way.

Second, I can trust this God on whom I depend.

There's a paradox in this:

Because you would think that giving up our independence and putting our trust in someone else would mean that we would lose our freedom.

But in actuality it is the exact opposite.

As I realize that I'm depending on God and not myself,

and as I place my trust in God instead of myself,

then every other one of those characteristics of children become mine again!

Now that I don't have to be in control and can trust God to take care of me,

I can afford to be curious, and I can't wait to learn new things!

Now that I don't have to worry about being in control of my life,

which means living it to please other people,

then I'm suddenly free to be more imaginative and creative

because I'm not worried about pleasing anyone else; I just want to please God.

And since I'm putting my trust in God, I can live in the moment,

knowing that no matter what I've done in the past, God forgives and forgets,

and with amazing alchemy, uses even my failures to bring about good.

And as I allow God to have more control of my life,

God works such signs and wonders and miracles,

that I find myself living with an even greater sense of wonder and delight and joy

than I think I've ever had even as a child.

Trying to live as an independent adult

who is completely responsible for his or her life is exhausting.

It's no wonder that there is so much unhappiness and anger and fear in the world today. Because thinking that we are grown-ups, we have run away from home,

when, in fact, God knows that we are simply his children

who need him as much today as we did when the world saw us as children

and who will continue to need him just as much until the day we die.

That's why, when we try to live as an independent adult

who is completely responsible for his or her own life,

instead of allowing ourselves to be dependent on God,

and trusting God as a small child trusts a parent,

the weight of carrying that burden weighs us down and exhausts us.

Jesus understands that and that's why he says,

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, & I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;

for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." [Mt 11:28-30]

In the beginning of our reading today, Jesus said that we should be like a child, like an infant. And here he gives us a second image: he said we should be like oxen.

We talked about that image at our pastors talk and text study this week.

We talked about oxen, and why they are yoked.

It's not that oxen don't do work; they work extremely hard.

But being yoked shifts and lightens the burden.

Imagine if you will 2 oxen or 4 or 4 or 20 not yoked together.

On their own, they can walk in any direction they want, and if they are hooked to a plow, then that plow is going to be being pulled all over the place.

It's going to be like a tug-of-war between the oxen to see which ox wins.

And for 1 ox to pull the plow with other oxen attached to it, it's going to be nigh impossible.

But yoke those oxen together in front of the plow that is driven by the farmer,

and all of the sudden the job becomes easier for each one of the oxen.

They still have to work, but they are not the ones determining the direction.

The farmer behind the plow is setting the direction

And because the oxen are yoked together, all of the oxen are going in the same direction,

so it's just not 1 ox pulling the plow in that direction; it's all of them.

If there are 1 it's ½ the work; if there are 4, it's ¼ of the work; if there are 20, it's 1/20 of the work. Putting on Jesus' yoke means allowing Jesus to set the direction for every single 1 of the oxen. It means having all of the oxen going in the same direction,

because Jesus is the one who has yoked us together and is driving us.

Being one of Jesus's oxen, or being a child of God,

means realizing and admitting that we are completely and totally dependent upon God,

and then submitting our wills completely and totally to God's will.

Being one of Jesus's oxen, or being a child of God,

means putting our trust completely and totally in Jesus, in God.

This is not just me talking. This is Jesus –

Jesus, who says that the secret of life is not found among the wise or the intelligent –

or the successful or the grown-up independent adults trying to control their own lives. The secret to life is to remember that each 1 of us is: a CHILD of God, no matter what our age.

This is not just me talking. This is Jesus –

Jesus, who says that the secret of life is allowing Jesus to yoke us together,

harness us to the plow, and go in the direction that Jesus decides.

You may think that giving up your independence and trusting in God

will somehow limit your life, but in actuality,

it's only when we understand that we are completely dependent upon God,

and when we put our trust totally in God and not ourselves,

that we are set free to live the way God has always intended us to live.

If you want wonder and delight and joy, if you want to have that imagination and creativity again,

if you want to remember what it's like to be curious and excited about learning new things,

if you want to let go of that burdensome past & worrisome future, & live in the present moment,

then stop depending on yourself, stop trusting in yourself,

and stop trying to control your own life and the lives of those around you.

Instead, realize that you are totally and completely dependent on God

and know that you can put your total and complete trust in God.

The secret of life for us, as individuals, is to be like a child –

dependent, trusting, curious, imaginative, creative, excited about learning new things,

and living in the moment, with a sense of wonder, delight, and joy.

And the secret of life for us as a congregation is to be like oxen –

yoked together, working together for Jesus,

who is guiding us all together in one direction to plow the fields

so that the seeds of the gospel can be planted & there can be a rich and abundant harvest. For when

we do that, we will discover that Jesus' yoke is easy, and his burden is light,

and we will find a rest in peace for our souls.

Let us pray.

God, you are our heavenly parent, and love toddlers are teenagers.

We sometimes think we're ready to go it on our own.

But you, dear God, know that we will always be your children,
and we will always need your guidance and your protection.

God, cut through the delusions and illusions we have,
that we are in control, that we are independent, and that we can trust in ourselves.

Help us to understand that we are totally and completely dependent on you
and that's okay because you are 100% trustworthy.

God, open our minds and free us from any fixed mindsets.

Remind us that there is always something new you wish to teach us.

Pull down the walls that we have erected around our unbelief systems,
so that we may learn from others.

Free us from the burdens of the past and the worries of the future,
so that we might live in the grace of the present moment.

Stir up our imaginations and stimulate our creativity.

And most of all, God, fill us

with oceans of wonder, rivers of delight and a never-ending fountain of joy. **Amen**