

Children have a deep spirituality. Their connection with God is so simple, so innocent and pure. A few weeks ago during Sunday LIFT, Linda and Chris were leading us on a Walking Meditation around the church. We came together in the Prayer Garden to talk about what we experienced. Some commented on the birds chirping, the music heard in the background, the warmth from the sun. Kaihl Nutting said, "I felt like God was giving me a hug." Children remind us that our faith should be so simple and pure.

Children don't have all the baggage that we get as we grow older. We get hurt by the church or begin to see hypocrisy in adults who have been role models. We begin to form theological questions, trying to make sense out of things we can't prove. As we mature, we eventually lose our innocence and simplicity about God, but Jesus says it shouldn't be that way. Our faith should remain simple like a child who eagerly receives God's grace.

Let's look at the context of this passage to see how complicated faith had become. These three verses are Jesus' response to the Pharisees who were questioning Jesus about the grounds for divorce. There was a big theological controversy between two schools of Jewish thought. They agreed that a divorce could be permitted based on Deuteronomy 24 that says that the husband can give his wife a divorce if the woman becomes displeasing to him if he finds something indecent about her. The argument was based on what was considered displeasing and indecent.

The House of Shammai was very strict on the interpretation, that the wife would become displeasing after committing adultery, a serious offense. But, the House of Hillel took a more permissive interpretation, saying that anything that displeases the husband could

be grounds for divorce. He could divorce his wife if he wanted to marry another woman who was younger, prettier, or richer. If anything displeased him, he could divorce her.

So, the Pharisees, with their endless questions, try to trick Jesus into picking sides. They want Jesus to incriminate himself and offend people, so they would stop following him. But, he did the most offensive thing – he took a child, the lowest of the low in their social structure, and told them they had to be like this child to see the kingdom of God. Instead of trying to prove the other wrong, have a simple faith. Instead of splitting hairs, overcomplicating things, or twisting scripture into justifying behavior, have a childlike attitude that focuses on receiving God's love and grace, not condemning others.

Children are so trusting and eager to be in God's presence. They are not demanding answers to questions before they open their hearts to Jesus. They are not trying to use scripture to justify behavior. They don't let anything get in the way of receiving their blessing from God. And, they recognize when God is giving them a hug.

About eight years ago, I was sitting in a Bible Study. I remember it was eight years because Logan is eight, but at the time he was seven months and Cameron was 21 months. I was a stay-at-home mom with two babies under two and a six-year-old, who thankfully was in school during the day. I was exhausted and needed a break, but we could not afford child care. I was in this Bible Study because it offered free child care.

I knew Bible Study was important, but I just wasn't in a place in my life to have my spiritual needs fulfilled. My life was on a 24-hour cycle that lacked consistent sleep and revolved around

diaper changing and filling sippy cups, not filling my spiritual needs. My spiritual needs weren't even in my thought process. I really didn't have a thought process at the time; I was just trying to stay on the hamster wheel.

I also wasn't in a place spiritually where I thought studying the Bible would answer all my theological questions that kept God at arm's length. We were attending church, and I knew I believed in the basics of faith, but I had a lot of questions that I couldn't work out logically. These unanswered questions kept me from experiencing an intimacy with Christ and receiving the full gift of grace.

The way I was taught the Bible growing up really seemed to muddle things. Taking verses out of context, twisting and turning them to fit in a situation for someone's self-gain only complicated my thinking. The church's stance on certain issues because of one or two verses taken out of the ancient culture's context did more harm than good. Because quite frankly, the church got it wrong many times, if you look back on history. So, I really didn't think my questions would be answered by studying the Bible.

Then, God showed up. One day, God prompted me to open my heart, and I did. I got a glimpse of God's presence. God started answering my questions by speaking through scripture. God showed me that sometimes I wanted answers to particular questions just to prove that I'm right and others are wrong, so my intentions needed to change. God showed me that sometimes I was asking the wrong question, and then God showed me the right question to ask, which usually led to another question. Sometimes God redirected my questions just like Jesus did in this passage, to show that it's not about

having the answers. It's about having a simple and trusting faith.

God showed me that I was being a Pharisee, and I needed to stop asking theological questions that don't have definitive answers on this side of heaven. In prayer, I confessed: "God, it just doesn't make logical sense." And, God said, "Duh. That's what faith is. Believing and trusting, even when it doesn't make logical sense." It's all mystery. That's the whole point.

Children are great with mystery. They don't question it; they eagerly accept it. We need to become great with mystery, or at least surrender to it. Children remind us of what our faith is supposed to be -- Simple, innocent and pure. They don't let unanswered questions get in the way of their connection with God. They don't need to be proven right. They eagerly open themselves to God's presence and seek to be taken up into Jesus' arms. Their simple spirituality is receiving God's grace.

We have the great opportunity today to receive God's grace through the sacrament of holy communion. I invite those who are serving communion to come forward at this time. As we prepare the table, I invite you to reflect on what you need to do to simplify your faith. What do you need to let go of to eagerly receive God's grace?