



Wayfaring

“Children”

BY BILL NABERS

“Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

— St. Luke 11:11-13

“Got to be good looking/’Cause he’s so hard to see/Come together right now/Over me.”

“Blackbird singing in the dead of night/Take these broken wings and learn to fly/All your life/ You were only waiting for this moment to arise.”

— John Lennon and Paul McCartney

In late June and early July of this year, you would have had to work very hard not to know about the Thai boys football (soccer) team. Twelve young boys and their coach from the “Wild Boars” football team were trapped by rising water deep in a huge cave. Eventually found, they spent 18 long days there before a daring and risky rescue got them out of the cave. The rescue was completed just hours before that section of the cave started to fill back up with water.

The world was riveted. Something about this story transcended all barriers.

National conflicts and unease, differing political persuasions, prejudice—all seemed to melt away before a shared concern for these children. Even governments that do not traditionally get along offered resources to one another. People prayed in many languages and through many different religious forms. News and social media were full of updates; communities offered prayers. When the boys were finally rescued, celebrations were shared around the globe. We briefly felt like one family.

But this not happen in a vacuum. At the same time that the “Thai boys” event was happening, the shameful separation of parents and children was occurring at the United States’ southwestern border. Meanwhile in the Middle East, some people were declared threats and deemed undeserving of basic human rights—depending on the label given them by various governments. Sadly, while hopeful notes were posted on social media about the Thai situation, the volume of hatred and prejudice spewing forth on other platforms did not abate. The “Thai boys” became an isolated event, instead of an opportunity for change.

How can this be? It seems like we just can’t connect the dots. If we are moved by the plight of children we have never met in Thailand, why aren’t we similarly affected by children and others closer at hand? How we feel about others of any age, or in any place, could be like how we viewed these boys on the other side of the globe.

Now I assure you that I am not naive. I have heard the arguments. “But they are only children.” “But that’s not how the world works.” To counter these notions, I put before you the passage that led off this column from Luke’s Gospel. In it Jesus makes several interesting analogies.

First, he expands the conversation from children to all people (“Those who ask”). It does not take a very detailed review of Scripture to find out that we are all children in the eyes of God. No matter our ages and all other factors, the vision of God is that we are all his children. If we are moved by the plight of some children, we need to apply that same perspective to all his children. We don’t get to pick and choose. We need to let God correct our “vision”.

I think of vision a lot these days. While my cataract surgery helped my long range vision, I am even more reliant upon my “cheaters” (reading glasses) for short range vision. This will probably continue to be even more true as I age. I can, and have, tried to read small print without my glasses. This usually leads to

a comical misunderstanding of things on my part. In the same way, God needs to adjust our vision of others. If we choose, in our vanity, to judge on our own ability, we will find mistake-ridden results. We need God’s lens for clarity.

But the second analogy may be a bit more surprising. Jesus acknowledges the reality of evil. “Who are evil” is spoken to all of us. None are excluded. The life is not a fairy tale where we live happily ever after. But then God points out that even in our fallen status we know how to give good gifts. Bam! We are able to do good when we realize who our children are. That refutes the arguments that we are not able to care as we should or that it is impractical to do so.

I could turn this into a deeply theological worded debate but think of it this way. There is a profound difference between “child-ish” and “child-like”. Babies are born selfish and we all have to learn how to share and care. (A great argument for original sin and infant baptism.) We keep being child-ish when we succumb to things like greed, having to have control over others, are prejudiced, etc. This is “childishness”—no matter our age. But we also have a “child-like” capacity for hope, curiosity and self-sacrifice for others. The Bible calls on us to fight the “child-ish” and embrace “child-like” growth in grace. This is especially true in the New Testament. We can’t achieve perfection, but God can guide us toward a better vision of ourselves and others.

While I have been thinking about this column, the Beatles (especially John and Paul) have also been on my mind and in my media viewing lately. (I just had a good friend visit Abbey Road studios and Liverpool and the extended McCartney car pool karaoke special just aired.) I think that in the late 60’s as their band fell apart and the world around them grew more child-ish, this pair of songwriters looked for hope both personally and corporately.

Paul, the primary writer of “Blackbird”, found hope in the civil rights movement. John, primary writer of “Come Together”, found hope in the peace movement. It is interesting to note that both were controversial subjects and neither man found perfection in those movements, or themselves, but saw a hope for a child-like growth.

That is the hope I have for now. I do believe that God can correct our vision of each other. I believe that despite our failings we can become more child-like and less child-ish. If so, the Thai boys story will become more the norm and far less exceptional. We can hope that a world

which pulls together for all its children will be more of a guide and less of an aberration. Even as we are all imperfect, we are all still children of God. May we all grow more child-like. Amen.