

# What the World Needs Now

Sunday, September 20, 2015; Jeremiah 31:31-34, Mark 9:30-37

Rev. Doug Abbott

---

What does the world need now?

The world needs you. God needs us. It is clearly evident in the words of Jeremiah this morning. I will be your God and you will be my people. God gives us his promise to be there for us. He wants us to be there for him. God has chosen us to be his people on earth, to be the source of his faith and his love, and not to lose faith in times of tribulation.

Today's scripture lesson from Mark shows us the way to do it.

On the road to Galilee, Jesus taught his disciples of his death and resurrection. And he went on to address the issue the disciples were discussing, "Who is the greatest among them". And Jesus said, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." This is our identity.

And then he took a child and said, "Whoever receives one such child, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." This is our source.

In these familiar verses, Jesus teaches us the keys to living, knowing our identity, which is servanthood, and knowing the source of our identity, him who sent me, which is faith. If we put the two together, then we have answered the question, "Who is the greatest? The greatest are those who are servants of God to all, which is love.

Jesus had just healed a young boy with an unclean spirit. The boy was brought to him by his father. The disciples had tried but were unsuccessful in healing. Jesus said to the father, "Bring him to me" and the father did. When the spirit saw the boy, it immediately threw him into convulsions. The boy fell on the ground, rolling about, rigid,

grinding his teeth, and foaming at the mouth. The father was totally freaking out. He said, “I believe, help my unbelief. Jesus rebuked the spirit in the child and commanded it to come out. Everyone thought the boy was dead. Jesus lifted him up. And he arose.

Jesus ministry and his personal faith were one and the same. Jesus brought the boy to life through prayer. Jesus also declared to the disciples that God would resurrect him after his forthcoming death. This is what we need, to have our identity constantly connected to the source, so that our service and faith are unified.

Jesus brings us life. His faith and love help us to live with and through the uncertainties of life, the fear of the unexpected, the grinding of the day, the stress of responsibilities, the grieving of potential loss, the illness that appears, or the disappointments beyond our control. Jesus ministry is pastoral yet powerful, prayerful yet practical. To the disciples, his words about resurrection were not understandable but real. But after his death, the disciples became convinced. God brings life into this world and asks us to be partners with him.

We are called to be servants of God’s love. This is soft power. We are not called to be enablers of injustice, or servants of fear, of doom, or of gloom. We are to be servants of love.

Jeremiah’s calling came at a time of captivity and exile of the people of Israel. God called Jeremiah to a life of prophesy, foretelling the coming of a new covenant.

Listen to these words in Jeremiah 1: 4-10.

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”

But the Lord said to me: “Do not say I am only a youth; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” Jeremiah fulfilled his calling.

And the new covenant has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This is our source of life, to model the spirit of Christ in the same way as we nurture children.

One of the fundamental strengths of our church is its commitment to children and youth. “Let the children come to me.” If parents want to see their children grow into adulthood with a strong foundation of faith, truth and love, then church is the place for them. I know from personal experience. All three of my children were baptized here, went through confirmation class, the church school and the youth fellowship programs. They all had close friends through the church throughout high school. Their church involvement was a priority equal to school activities. Wendy participated in church and school musicals. Keith was a varsity hockey player for three of his four years. Lynne captained three sports her senior year and is inducted into the Wilton High School Hall of Fame.

I urge the involvement of church members in our Children’s Church and Family Ministry and in our Youth Ministry. I saw a TV clip of Jimmie and Rosalyn Carter attending an Atlanta Braves baseball game. He leaned over and gave her a kiss during the game. Here he is 92 years old, in love, on chemo for cancer, and still teaches church school on Sundays. The call goes out to invite men of our church to do the same,

kiss their bride at a ballgame and assist in children's and youth ministries.

Pope Francis is here in North America. He landed in Cuba yesterday and will be visiting Washington, D.C., New York City and Philadelphia. His speech to Congress on Tuesday is the hottest ticket in town.

Pope Francis has captivated the interest and affection of people throughout the world. He is reshaping the pastoral approach of the Catholic Church and the application of church doctrine. He is reaching out to the poor, to the helpless, and to children. The photos of him hugging a child or sitting with a child in his lap in a crowded street show the sincerity of his beliefs.

Millions of people will turn out to see him in person. He shows what is needed most in the world today. He was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Ber goal io) in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1936, to immigrant parents from Italy. Francis' grandparents and father left Italy in 1927 to flee from the fascist regime of Mussolini. They missed boarding the ocean liner they were booked to take. That ocean liner sank. The family took another vessel to Buenos Aires and landed safely. He had a calling to the priesthood at the age of sixteen. You know the rest of the story.

His leadership embraces the pastoral needs of children and their families.

The pressures and expectations of children living in Fairfield County are as real and demanding as those living in other places. It can be a difficult time for children growing up in such a highly competitive and success oriented culture. They need to be attended to and cared for. We have a wonderful opportunity to support and build together the youth and children's ministries in this church.

Psalm 76:

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;

The things we have heard and understood,

The things our fathers have told us,

These we will not hide from their children,

But will tell them to the next generation:

the glories of the Lord and his might

and the marvelous deeds he has done

the witness he gave to Jacob,

the law he established in Israel.

He gave a command to our fathers

To make it known to their children

That the next generation might know it,

The children yet to be born.

Amen.

