

Faith Mennonite Church  
Pentecost 2 ~ May 18, 2008

Child/Parent Dedication  
*Mark 10: 13-16*

The birth of children has to do with God's work in both creation and redemption. In our act of blessing and dedication, we praise God with the words of the Psalmist "for it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:13-14a).

In the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition we do not baptize infants, believing that is a ritual appropriate to an informed choice to follow Jesus on the part of each individual. However, this act of dedication declares that the loving work of God's grace through Christ includes all who are born. When infants and children are presented to God and to the church, they are placed in the care of the church. In the care of loving parents and the church, children can grow up with and into the loving faith of their community.

Jesus made children a model of faith, as we just read in Mark 10. Their dependant and trusting natures make them receptive to God's presence in their lives. It is the task of families and the church to nurture this faith and also to be nurtured by the lives and wonder and questions of these children as they grow to maturity.

This morning we have three sets of parents who are dedicating their children and themselves to the nurture of their children. Heather and Mark are dedicating Elias. Thaine and Judy are bringing Rita, their recently adopted daughter. And Brooke and Jason are consecrating both of their children, Elissa and Zachary. Judy is not a member of this congregation but has strong ties to it. Brook and Jason started attending our church last summer. This is the first faith community they have been part of as a couple and in dedicating their children they are also making a commitment to their own journey of faith exploration and commitment.

This morning we are also initiating a new practice in our church, that of pairing an individual or couple as a "Parenting Partner" for each family at the time of a child dedication. As described in an article, "It takes a village," in the May Newsletter, the deacons hope that this will help make practical our congregational commitment to support families in the task of parenting. This is a commitment of all, but these partners have agreed to a special relationship which will involve sitting together in church, occasional childcare, and sharing times of celebration. This does not change the relationship of others to these families, it simply deepens a particular relationship. Arlene and Ken Holdeman have agreed to be partners for Brooke and Jason; Dick and Sandra Westby for Thaine and Judy; and Karen Wiebe and Anna Dennis for Mark and Heather.

At this time I will invite the parents to come forward to make their statements of hope for their children and their commitment to parenting. (Parents' sharing)

Deacon: We now invite any family members who are present, the deacons, the parenting partners, and any others who would like to stand with these parents in the dedication of their children. Please bring your blue hymnals.

Deacon: When parents present their children to God before the congregation, they come to thank God for the life entrusted to them, to offer their child back to God and to ask for God's blessing

on their life together. We as a congregation come to share their joy, to pray with them for the child's wellbeing and to receive the child into the care of the church. Like Hannah and Mary of old, you brought your children here to consecrate them to God. You have come to offer Elias, Rita, Elissa and Zachary into the strong and tender providence of God and the nurture of the church. Let us pray:

Gracious God, like a father who nurtures his children you have cared for us; like a mother you have called us by name and claimed us as your own; you have loved us into being, placed us in human families, and bless us on our journey. By the presence of your Spirit consecrate these children and parents for their journey together through life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Pastor: I have several questions for the parents, beginning with those who are members or are interested in exploring membership with the church:

- Mark, Heather, Thaine, Brooke and Jason: Do you accept your child as a gift from God? (We do)
- Do you dedicate yourselves as parents to bring up your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, preparing your child to respond to God's grace of his or her own free will? (We do)
- Do you promise to gladly surrender your child to the ministry or service to which God may call him or her, even if it might involve going to the ends of the earth? (We do)
- Judy, will you support the nurture and involvement of Rita in this congregation? (I will)
- Arlene, Karen and Anna, Dick and Sandy: will you support these parents and children in a special way through friendship and prayer? (We will)

Congregation, if you accept responsibility for the wellbeing of these children, please turn to #791 in the back of the blue hymnal to covenant with these families.

#### Act of Consecration

Pastor: Parents, may the God who has entrusted you with your children grant you fullness of love in raising them. May God grant you to live a life of faithfulness before your children so that they might know the way of the kingdom. And Laurel and Hannah, may God help you to be loving sisters.

Elias / Rita / Elissa and Zachary: May God who created you, Jesus who loves you, and the Spirit who surrounds you, watch over you and help you to seek, to find, and to know your heavenly parent. May God bless you and keep you; may God's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May God's presence embrace you and give you peace. Amen.