



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Third Sunday After Trinity, June 8th, 2008

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

(Judges 2:6-14) At both ends of the age spectrum there are special hindrances to ministry. We talked about some of those at the upper end of the age spectrum last time—especially the leisure, retirement mentality that is so foreign to Scripture. We said that older people are to be prized (Leviticus 19:32) and mobilized and evangelized (Psalm 71:18). The kind of ministry that you can do will change with age. But there is no biblical teaching to suggest that between 65 and 95 (or whenever), saints should play while the world perishes.

Now today I want to begin focus on the younger end of the spectrum. I know that some of you don't have children and never will. Others have children who are grown. Nevertheless, I speak to you all because it is crucial that what God has to say about children be part of our shared Christian view of life. So even though I speak for the children and speak mainly to parents and parents-to-be, the word is needful for us all.

Joshua died when he was 110 years old, according to Judges 2:8. He had brought the people of Israel into the promised land of Canaan, had led them through many victories, and had set them a good example of faith in God. After his death, others of his generation lived on for a while, but then they too died out. While they lived, the people of Israel served God faithfully, because the memory of his greatness was preserved. While the memory of God's greatness and the work he did for Israel was alive, the people maintained their devotion to God.

But verse 10 says that after the death of Joshua and those who had seen God's mighty acts, "there arose another generation after them, who did not know the Lord or the work which he had done for Israel." And the result of this ignorance is given in verse 11, "The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the

Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt." And then verse 14 describes the divine response to this idolatry. "So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers."

The three lessons for us that I want to draw out of this text are simple, but so needful. First, when the knowledge of God is preserved in a community, especially by those who have personally experienced God's power, faith is nourished and obedience flourishes. Second, if parents allow their children to grow up without this knowledge of God, they serve not only their children's ignorance and unbelief, but also their destruction. Third, therefore it is the solemn duty of all parents to teach their children about God and his saving work, so that the next generation will know and be saved. Since the first two of these lessons lead to the last one, this is what I want to talk about mainly. It is God's will that parents assume responsibility to teach their children what God has revealed about himself. It is we parents who have the first and foremost responsibility to see that our children think correctly about God. The most important school a child should ever attend is the home. And the most influential theological teachers he should ever have are Mom and Dad.

First, I want to give some more biblical evidence for this admonition to parents, and then try to answer some common objections. The most important text from the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 6:4-9. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord your God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." Jesus said that was the first and great commandment. And every Jew knew, just like I want every one of you to know, what comes next in this great text. "And these words which I command you shall be upon your

heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children." The first assignment a parent has after loving God is to store God's Word in his heart and teach it to his children.

These same two priorities (to your own heart and to your children) are also commanded in Deuteronomy 4:9: "Take heed and keep *your soul* diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from *your heart* all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children." (A word to grandparents too!) Joel 1:3 puts it in a nutshell: "Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation." (See also: Deut 11:18-19; Matt. 19-14ff; Eph 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21).

So I conclude from these Scriptures that it is God's will that the family be preserved and that parents assume primary responsibility under God for getting biblical and doctrinal knowledge into the heads and hearts of their children. Evidently when Judges 2:10 says that another generation arose who did not know the Lord, it is because many parents had neglected their God-ordained responsibility. The result was that the new generation forsook the Lord and brought judgment on itself. It is clear, then, that if we parents neglect this duty, we serve not only the ignorance and unbelief of our children, but also their destruction.

O how I want the mothers and fathers of our church to be teachers of the Word of God in your homes. So let me try to answer two objections which may come to your mind. First, some might say that parents have no right to prejudice a child regarding what he will accept as true. It is better to leave all religious options open, and then when he chooses one, it will be owing to authentic commitment, not to parental authority. There are three problems with that objection.

1) It goes counter to all the teaching of Scripture that parents are to teach truth about God.

2) It is impossible not to teach children about God, because not to teach them is to teach them plenty. It teaches them that Jesus does not matter much, that Mom and Dad don't consider him nearly as important or exciting as new furniture, or weekends at the lake, or Dad's job, or all the other things that fill their conversation. Silence about Christ is dogma. Not to teach the infinite value of Christ is to teach that he is negligible.

3) It is not true that teaching children about God has to make them close-minded and irrationally prejudiced. It might if the parents are insecure and have their own faith built on sand. But if parents see

compelling reasons for being a Christian, they will impart these to their children as well. Nobody accuses a parent of prejudicing a child's cosmology because he tells the child the world is round, why? Because we know these things are so and can give evidence to a child eventually that will support this truth. And so it is with those who are persuaded for good reasons that the Christian faith is true.

4) And, fourth, it is simply unloving and cruel not to give a child what he needs most. Since we believe that only by following Christ in the obedience of faith can a child be saved for eternity, escape the torments of hell, and enjoy the delights of heaven, it is unloving and cruel not to teach him the way.

A second objection some parents may raise is: I don't know enough about the Bible and about doctrine to teach my children and to answer their hard questions. There are two reasons why this should not stop you. First, it is never too late to begin to study and grow in your grasp of Bible truth. You may be a better teacher than a veteran because you are learning it fresh yourself.

The second reason your sense of inadequacy should not stop you is that some tremendously valuable things can be taught when you don't know the answer to a child's hard question. I can think of two. You can teach your child humility. If you are secure enough in God to show your ignorance rather than bluff and be a hypocrite, your child learns the beauty of humility. Second, you can teach your child to take some initiative of his own in solving problems. you can say, "Let's stop at the church library and look it up in the Bible dictionary," and so teach your child how to use the library and communicate your own seriousness about answering his questions. Don't let a sense of ignorance and inadequacy stop you. God wants you to grow, and he will help you do what is right.

I close with an admonition and a promise. It is the solemn duty of parents to teach their children about God and the greatness of his saving work. Their salvation may hang in the balance, but so does your joy. And so I close with a promise from Proverbs 23:24, 25. "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he that begets a wise child shall have joy in him. Your father and your mother shall be glad, and she who bore you shall rejoice." May God fill our families with this joy in the years to come.

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.