

Playing “Together”

July 8, 2018

Our Savior’s Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Kumfer

We are in week three of our together focus and this week’s specific topic is playing together. So, let’s play a little bit with some Bible trivia.

We will continue our discussion this morning by doing a little exercise. Raise your hand if you can think of a Bible verse with the word play in it. Ok now put your hand down if that verse about play relates to playing an instrument. It’s as I suspected. There are very few verses that we can think of that directly talk about play in the Bible. In fact, I have found only a handful of verse that talks about playing. One is about animals playing and the other two occur only when Christ has come again. One verse from Zechariah 8:5 says, “The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.”

This is a beautiful image. Boys and girls playing in the Holy City of Jerusalem after Jesus has returned to claim what is His. It’s a blessing that we can’t hope to have here and now. Or is it?

When we came up with this “Together” series, playing together came to us and was never questioned by anyone. It makes sense to us that we should play together. In fact, it’s a part of the information that Open Arms provides on their website for families looking for Childcare. We tell people, “Programs are planned to encourage and develop individual strengths and abilities, while helping your child to understand the value of cooperation and interaction with others. This is achieved through working, learning,

playing, and sharing with other children as well as adults.” It appears as though play is indeed important and I think most of you would agree. But how is it? Ms. Carrienne, as my boys call her, has some insights to share with us about playing together. Please watch.

Playing together does a great many things. But since the Bible doesn't really talk about playing should we really be talking about it? My answer is of course yes but not based solely on the idea of playing activities or games together. The way that the Bible handles playing together is through a playful attitude.

Think again to all the verses of the Bible that you associate play with. Most of the play specific verses talk about playing an instrument. Something that is done joyfully and in celebration. What about other verses that speak about doing things joyfully. Our passage from Ecclesiastes today says that there is a time for everything. This includes play. I agree that this isn't enough to support the idea that a playful attitude is important. That's where our gospel reading for today comes in. Here, we have the disciples and numbers of people coming to see Jesus. There are all kinds of people there including families. And these families want to bring their children to see Jesus and be blessed by him.

Well try as the families might the disciples aren't allowing it. They are hindering them to keep them away from Jesus. They might assume that Jesus has more important people to meet with. Children just don't measure up. That culture didn't value children because there was nothing they could bring to the table. Sounds a lot like today's societal values to me.

Anyway, all this is happening and Jesus looks up and sees the disciples sending the children away. Mark, of all the other Gospels, points out Jesus' emotions when this is happening. Jesus is indignant. He was angry and annoyed at their unfair treatment.

Jesus then corrects the disciples and tells them, “Let the children come to me.” This is a great line for us to hear but the Greek has a

nuance that isn't often caught here. The original Greek translates the phrase as "let them keep coming to me."

This is just the beginning for Jesus because he is using these children to teach the disciples about an attitude of play. Jesus knew exactly what would happen when those children got to him. They would be excited and jumping around, playing with his beard and trying so hard to get his attention. Children are born with an innate attitude for play. And Jesus welcomed them into his presence. Not only that, but he took them up in his arms and corrected not only the disciples actions but their entire thoughts about children. He said, "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

It's important to be reminded here that there is nothing important about a child in this culture. But Jesus welcomes them and upholds them as the receivers of the kingdom of God because of their attitude. Their attitude of play is one that connects them to Jesus. Because the attitude of play isn't concerned about what is, but what could be. What could be for the children is Jesus as their messiah. He is the one who welcomes all people into his arms and blessed them through his life, death, and resurrection. The Greek also reveals that when Jesus welcomed the children into his arms he fervently blessed them. There was emotion to it. There was excitement to it.

You could say that he was just welcoming the children because it is easier for them to believe, and you may be right but why is that? I'd say because of their attitude of play. They are playing with their God. They are learning about him, like Ms. Carianne reminded us. They are engaging in a relationship with Jesus that is meaningful and important. It's here where that Zechariah verse comes back into focus because those future actions play a vital importance to how we live today. Play is not just for children. It's too good to be left only for children.

Brian Edgar who is the author of the book, *The God Who Plays*, says it very well, "Christians should take much more seriously the traditional understanding of the church, which interprets the future kingdom of God in terms of play, laughter, and dance, and to see

the implications of this for three areas of life: (a) our present relationship with God, (b) the way we interpret the world today, and (c) the most appropriate form of community life within the church.”

This attitude of play affects everything we do. It shapes who we are, it teaches us how to live in the world, and it teaches us about our God. The God who gave us the desire to enjoy life, which can only be done when we are in His arms.