

“Creative Play”
August 15, 2010
Grove Presbyterian Church

Old Testament Lesson

Zechariah 8: 1-5

The word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

New Testament Lesson and Reflection

Luke 7: 31-35

It is a sign of prosperity and peace. It is God’s promise. God will return to Zion. God will dwell in the midst of the people God loves. When that happens two parallel things will happen in Jerusalem:

1. It will be called faithful
2. It will be called the holy mountain

Thus comes the signs that salvation has come, Lord Almighty, the promised day has come. These then are the signs of the new age: kids play in the streets of Zion (aka Jerusalem) and old folks sit around feeling safe and at ease and respected. There’s a vision for you.

But it hasn’t come yet. Jesus sure doesn’t see it yet. Listen:

“To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling to one another, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.”

This is the equivalent of “I’m taking my ball and going home.” Jesus is fed up with them being whiney and pouty. They’re like spoiled children who throw tantrums when they don’t get what they want. Nothing pleases them because they don’t want to be pleased.

For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, “He has a demon”; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say,

**“Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!”
Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.’**

Reflection:

Creative Play

Fact is, Jesus did not play AYSO, though it is likely he did play soccer. Along with other ball games.

Fact is, we know Jesus didn't play video games or watch TV – no electricity!

Between the Bible and archeology, we have a pretty good idea of how Jesus played.

- Word games – riddles, singing games
- Boxing, wrestling, contests of skills – discus, javelin, archery, races,
- Tug of war
- Dolls – well, maybe Jesus' sisters
- Board games
- Marbles
- Carved toys of animals, ships, chariots
- Spinning tops
- Whistles
- Hopscotch and jacks
- Ropes, hoops, and balls

...when they weren't doing their chores, that is.

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When I wasn't doing my chores, my back yard was a 100 acre wood. Me and Christopher Robin. It would be “Bye, mom,” at 8 in the morning. Sometimes we'd pack several sandwiches or roast hot dogs on sticks out in the woods. We always carried matches or a magnifying glass. Be prepared. We climbed trees. We dammed up the creek. We floated boats down the creek. We raced sticks down the creek. We captured bumble bees in jars. We played war. We whittled. We explored. If we had to pee, we peed. When the cow bell was rung, we'd dawdle home for dinner. Nighttime meant chasing lightning bugs. Mom had no idea what we had done. She had no idea where we had been. So long as we were relatively uninjured – no broken bones, no excessive bleeding -- all was well with the world.

How we remained seriously uninjured, unharmed, or unmolested remains a mystery. Stitches, broken bones, concussions, minor fire burns do not count. In a pinch, we did look after each other.

Do kids still build forts?

We didn't need and we didn't want adults interfering with our sports or games. Who needed organized sports? We knew the rules. When the rules didn't apply, we'd figure it out and make up our own rules. The art of negotiation and compromise. Puppies learn by tussling and rolling and biting. We human puppies learn the same way.

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In educational worlds, this is called a matter of a good executive function. Self-regulation, controlling your emotions and your behavior.

Which teachers are seeing less and less of these days. Because fewer and fewer kids today know how to play.

One exercise to build up the executive function is called the freeze game. In the game with which we are more familiar, the music plays and when the music stops, all the players freeze. In this version, the teacher holds a stick figure above her head and moves it to the music. When the music stops, the signal given, the kids have to wait a moment, then they imitate the stick figure.

Because of the lack of creative play today, kids have to be taught to play.

They have trouble amusing themselves

They have trouble calming themselves down.

They have trouble being good sports, -- they are instead trained to look to some adult referee telling them what's acceptable and what isn't. What the rules are.

They have trouble imagining, because they watch too many movies, too many screens, too many cartoons. Instead of imagining how Mary Poppins looks or how Bre're Rabbit sounds, we tell them, we show them, we imprison them in the opinions of the movie makers.

You want to ruin a good book like the Lord of the Rings – turn it into a movie! Its now no longer my image of Frodo that matters but Peter Jackson's.

Can't blame the kids. Not at all. Can blame us adults for making them this way. Instead of creative, open ended play, we've stifled them with screens, leagues, and lessons.

Once upon a time home life was stable and play unstructured. Now we have too much of the reverse. Home is unstable and play structured.

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When I was a kid we did not want adults interfering, telling us how or what. You only can scrounge up half a team? No problem. We supply our own pitcher. We play without

a third baseman. Any ball hit into right field is an automatic out. What if your hit skies and smacks the street lamp and busts the bulb? That's a do-over. It's also means slaps on the back congratulating you. A little damage is a proud thing.

We kids didn't want adults entering our world. Dads worked and mom's were busy at home doing whatever it is moms do. Benign neglect best describes the art of parenthood. Let's avoid messing up the natural order. If any of our parents showed up to watch one of our games, it would be terribly awkward. "Yo, Andrews, what's your mom doing on the sidelines? Why'd she bring a folding chair? You in trouble or something?" We lived in separate worlds and we both were far happier that way. There was the kid world and there was the adult world, and so long as my arteries weren't squirting blood, never the twain should meet.

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Fact: unstructured play allows for exploration and discovery.

Fact: different areas of the brain are used and fired up by unstructured play

Fact: exercise helps pump fresh oxygen to the brain

Fact: continuous non-stop academic study, without recess, heightens aggression

Fact: When three Texas schools reduced recess to allow more classroom time, 3rd grade students performed less well academically and exhibited increased health risks.

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It is also a matter of imagination. To create a mental image not perceived through the senses. Pure work of the mind.

Imagination is what is behind the whole "made in the image of God" thing back in Genesis. The Bible proclaims how it was God's imagination that created the world and us. We are created in the image of God.

We are the result of God's creative play.

When we imagine, we create as God creates. We are like our God. When our children play, safe and happy, and when the old folks sit, smile, and watch, the age of salvation has truly come.

Imagine that.