

Year B: Proper 12  
Given at Grace University Lutheran Church  
July 30, 2006  
Sermon by Amy L. Hartman

Text: John 6:1-21

Grace and peace to you my brothers and sisters in Christ, through the God who creates all that we have, the Christ who feeds us in our midst, and the Spirit who calls all of God's children to more than they could ever imagine. Amen.

It is a privilege to be with you as the guest preacher today, really it is, despite the record-setting heat we are experiencing. My biggest concern today is sticking to the varnish on the pew...

I would also like to add that I have appreciated working with you as the church secretary the past four months to join in carrying out the ministry of this congregation. It is a joy to see all that you are up to as a congregation and to see how the Spirit is working in your midst to be a welcoming, healing, and reconciling presence where God has placed you.

My husband Jim and I went to visit my parents in northern Wisconsin over the July 4 holiday. One of the things I did when I was there was look for a book I remembered from my childhood. The title was, "The Boy who gave his lunch away." Luckily, the book was still there and I read it again. It was the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000, but it focused on the boy who offered his lunch when he saw the need for food for the crowd. It told of his upbringing in a family that valued service, compassion, and generosity. His place in the crowd of 5,000 was near Jesus and his disciples, and when he heard the discussion and concern about how to feed the crowd, he knew what he needed to do. He offered his two fish and five loaves to Jesus.

In John's gospel text for today, it says that Jesus knew what he was going to do when he experienced the hungry crowd. He knew he was going to feed all the people there. And interestingly, a child sharing his lunch emerged as a part of the plan. A child provided what was needed to start the process of the miracle which followed.

When I am not working here at Grace, I am the National Director of a movement within the ELCA called "Cherish Our Children." Cherish Our Children is both a philosophy AND a very specific congregational ministry focused on prayer, education, relationships, and action to prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people.

This quilt on the altar today shows the logo for Cherish Our Children, with adults and children of all races joined together, in the form of paper cut-outs made with folded paper and a scissors. The handprints around the edge were done by children and adults at the COC open house back in April and by the Grace VBS students back in June. Over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday, my mom pinned and ironed and I stitched to put the front together. The quilters at Augustana Lutheran Church – the home of COC national headquarters - put the back on and tied it.

Now I take it with me when I am out speaking as a visual expression of how we can all join hands – so to speak – in cherishing all of God’s children.

The foundation of Cherish Our Children is prayer. We ask that congregations have specific adults praying on a daily basis for specific children, ages birth to 25. These are called “Cherish Prayers,” and they remind the community of faith of the promise we made to children when they are baptized, that we will pray for them as they grow in their walk with Christ. We describe “children” as birth to 25 years old because of the research on adolescent brain development which indicates that the decision-making ability of a person’s brain is not fully functioning until ages 23-25, making young people in their early twenties still vulnerable to influences they do not yet understand.

When I was a child I remember watching a television program called Romper Room. Anyone here remember that show? Interestingly, there used to be a room in the library at St. Olaf, my alma mater, called the Romper Room – anyone remember that? Anyway, on the television Romper Room, there was always a time where the woman host would look through a hand-held circular thing and pretend she was looking out at who was watching the show. There were swirling designs on the television screen to show the “mystery” of her being able to see all the children. She would then say, “I see Joey, Susie, Peter, Agatha, Carrie...”

Then the show would end.

Now I’ve had conversations with others from my generation about this, and many of us cannot remember her ever saying our names. Did any of you experience that? Maybe I didn’t watch the show enough..., which makes me think that was probably why they did that, so kids would watch the show to hear their name.

In contrast to the lady on Romper Room, I believe that the one we call Christ cherishes each and every child, at all times, and calls us each by name. As followers of Christ, as members of Christ’s church, we are called to do the same. We are called to notice the gifts of each and every child, and expect great miracles to come from those gifts, no matter how small they seem to be. We are called to look at young and old, rich and poor, friends and enemies, understood and misunderstood as children of God. We are called to love the person who carries the handprint that has a place in the quilt of humanity. We are called to shake up and dismantle the systems that sexually exploit and destroy the lives of our most vulnerable.

And this call may all start with one child who touches our heart and gives a gift which grows into a miracle.

And today, because this is God’s house, not the Romper Room, I would like us to hear the names of all the children who are members of the congregation, ages birth to 25, and any others you would like to name aloud or to yourself.

I will begin with the youngest:

Lucy	Oskar	Robb	Dillon
Sophie	Annika	Isabelle	William
Karl	Ethan	Emma	Alexander
Mara	Britta	Meredith	Christian
Maria	Madeleine	Calvin	Eric
Charles	Ryan	Emily	Julia
Anna	Aaron	Grace	Jonathan
Tobias	Hannah	Tavis	Siri
Elliot	Theodore	Nicholas	Anna
Henrich	Anna	Nicholas	Luke
Julia	Karin	Alexander	Olowatosin
Marit	Anne	Lea	Alex
Matthew	Henry	Benjamin	Perry
Luke	Nora	Samuel	Erin
Sydney	Patricius	Ann	Anna
Jane	Isabella	Jessica	Laura
Charles	Isaac	Matthias	Andrew
Nadia	Brian	Ryan	Kari
Alejandra	Clara	Eric	Kaj
Samuel	Michael	River	Laura
Peter	Carina	Claire	Elliot
Marta	Jennifer	Madeline	Susan
Allison	Lillian	Rozlyn	Terry
Garrett	Esther	Matthew	Michael
Elizabeth	Annalise	Michael	Margaret
Morgan	Johannes	George	Evan
Severin	Caleb	Noah	Ambre
Haley	Peter	Eric	Tricia
Theodore	August	Zachary	Cara
Emily	Charles	Peder	Peter
Cooper	Maren	Emily	

And others we name at this time:

Please join me in prayer,

O God we ask that according to the riches of your love, you would strengthen these children and young people with power through your Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith, while they are rooted and grounded in your love. We ask that they will have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, as they seek the fullness that is you. We know you are at work within each of them – within each of us – to be able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. May your love be known to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.