

22nd Sunday after Pentecost (November 13, 2011)

engage!

“Engage By Commitment”

Text: [I John 3:14-18](#), [Luke 12:16-21](#)

By the [Rev. Dr. James A. Harnish](#)

If you’ve been following the readings in our Daily Discipleship Journal, you began the week with these words from the 78th Psalm.

We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD and the wonders that he has done...He commanded our ancestors to teach their children...So that they should set their hope in God and keep his commandments. (Psalm 78:4-7)

We take the task of teaching our children very seriously around here. Raising the next generation of Christian disciples is one of our highest ministry priorities and one of the largest commitments in our annual budget. I praise God for our staff and lay leadership, for over two hundred volunteers who serve in these ministries, and for your financial commitments that make it all possible, from paying for everything from the buildings and staff to utilities and insurance bills.

Given everything we have heard from Penn State this week, I’m also grateful that United Methodist Churches in Florida have the most comprehensive child protection policy of any organization in this state. It includes background checks on everyone who serves with children and youth, annual training for staff and volunteers, strict requirements about how adults relate to children. No adult is ever alone with a child in this congregation. We also have clear accountability if there is any suspicion of any inappropriate behavior.

I am grateful beyond the ability of words to express that I can stand before you today and say that in the nearly 20 years that I have served as the pastor of this church, we have never had an accusation of any inappropriate behavior with any child in our ministries. We can praise God for that. Nothing is more important than insuring the well-being of our children.

But this morning I want to turn the psalm around the other way by asking our children to teach the rest of us. It’s your turn to learn from them.

Last weekend our 4th and 5th graders and their adult leaders loaded up the church bus (which parenthetically is also funded through the church budget) and headed off for an overnight trip to Orlando to

participate in an event for pre-teens called “Superstart.” Just imagine 600 pre-teen kids packed into one place at one time! That’s enough energy to set off a nuclear reaction! It involved a lot of high energy activities, loud pumping music, and sleeping – or *not* sleeping! – on a church floor. The adults were a little bleary-eyed when they got home, but the kids seemed to be doing just fine.

Some of them are with me here this morning to tell you a little bit about it. (Interview with children.)

Tell us your name and where you are in school.

What was so great about “Superstart”? Was Pastor Matt a good bus driver?

I see you have these bracelets. They say, “I’m a thing-a-buffoon.” So what does that mean? What’s a “thing-a-buffoon”?

I hear that you talked about how people can use things in stupid ways or use them in God’s way. Like this saw blade. What did you learn about it? [It’s great for cutting wood, but it would not be used as a Frisbee.] So, our job as followers of Jesus is to use our lives the way God wants us to use them.

Anyone ever have a tough time doing what you know Jesus would want you to do? It’s not always easy to do the right thing.

I’d say the children got the message. So, what about you?

How do we use the things that God has given us? Our life, our time, our energies, our talents, our relationships, our money.

We get to choose.

Do we use those things in stupid, self-serving, ways, or do we use them in God’s way?

Do we use them to satisfy our own self-centered interests or do we use them in ways that make God’s love in Jesus Christ real to others?

The bible “thing-a-buffoon” isn’t in the bible. The word the bible uses is “fool” or “foolish.” Those words appear 234 times in scripture. Here’s one of them.

Jesus told a story about a rich man who already had everything he needed, but started getting richer and as he got richer he started getting more and more stuff. So much stuff, in fact, that he had nowhere to store it. Jesus said he asked himself, “What shall I do?” The man answered his own question by saying, “I will build bigger barns to store all my stuff.” Then he leaned back and said to himself, **“You have plenty of things stored up for yourself. Eat, drink and be merry.”**

Now, listen to what Jesus said about him. **But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”(Luke 12.20)**

Jesus called that man a “thing-a-buffoon.” And Jesus made the point clear: **“So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.”** (Luke 12:19-21)

John was pointing to the same principle in our scripture reading this morning when he said, **“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” (I John 3:14-18)** It’s all about the choices we make and the actions we take. Will we use the things God gives us in foolish ways, or will we use them in God’s way?

Thinking about those “thing-a-buffoon” bracelets reminded me of the bracelets people used to wear that had the letters WWJD. It stood for “What Would Jesus Do?” If memory serves me correctly, those bracelets went out of fashion shortly after 9/11. Maybe it was a question we didn’t want to ask anymore. Or maybe we were uncomfortable with the answer we might have been given. But it’s still the basic question of our discipleship. What would Jesus do? Or what would Jesus have us do?

Some of these kids know that the answer to that question is not always easy. It’s not always easy to find the answer to that question in some of the complex issues we face today. And when we find the answer, it’s almost never easy to do it. It would not have been easy for a 28-year-old, former quarter back, student assistant to rescue a 10-year-old boy from his defensive coach in the Penn State locker room. But it would have been the right thing to do.

That brings us to the commitments we are making right now. We’ve been exploring what it means for us to engage in the new life, the abundant life, the eternal life that Jesus came to bring. We’ve been discovering what it means to engage in the spiritual disciplines that form us into the likeness of Christ in the Christian community, in releasing our gifts for ministry, in the spiritual discipline of financial generosity, and through the commitment of our prayers, presence, gifts and service.

So, let me tell you where we are. As of Friday afternoon, 112 people have made 632 commitments to service through the ministries of the church. 162 people have made financial commitments, underwriting about one-third the financial support that would be required just to maintain our current ministries. It’s a good start, but we still have a long way to go.

Now is the time for each of us to make our commitments for 2012. You can do that by using one of the **engage** commitment cards, going on our website, or by scanning the barcode in your bulletin today. It's the practical way we stop being a "thing-a-buffoon" and start living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The kids got the point. Do you?

We don't have bracelets for you this morning, but we do have crosses...this small pocket cross you can carry around in your pocket or purse. Every time you reach for your keys or your money, it will be a reminder to you of who you are and of who God is calling you to be in Jesus Christ. Whether you are making your commitment this morning, or have already made it, you've invited to come here during the offering or the closing music to seal that commitment in prayer, to take up one of these crosses, and to renew your commitment to Jesus Christ.

To lead us into this time of commitment, I invite you to join me in the prayer that John Wesley gave to the early Methodists as a way of renewing their covenant with God.

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.