

## *For Our Children*

Luke 18.15-17

Children's Sabbath 2010

October 24, 2010

I feel an urgent need to throw all caution to the winds and to risk all to try to finish the quest for justice and inclusion that our founding fathers dreamed of... It is now time for the next great movement, for our children.

- Marian Wright Edelman

### *Reading*

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. <sup>16</sup>But Jesus called for them and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>17</sup>Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.'

Make no mistake; our celebration of Children's Sabbath today is all about our kids; period, end of story. Our purpose is to discern a way forward, recommitting ourselves to their protection and nurture. That being said, I would like to get one thing off my chest. I want the world know that we parents are martyrs, all of us! No one under God's blue skies sacrifices more than we, and no one is less appreciated! Think of the endless things that we do for our children: we drive 'em to soccer games, football practice, music lessons, and slumber parties. We go to concerts; we search for the perfect Halloween costume, you know, the one that has been sold out in five stores for six weeks! We are martyrs all, and we should congratulate ourselves on everything that we long suffering saints do for our kids.

We have to congratulate ourselves, because the kids don't get it. They don't appreciate what their parents do for 'em. Take my parents, for example; if they were martyrs, I certainly didn't recognize it. In fact, while you would never guess it, I grew up in a household full of neglect bordering on abuse. And I have the proof.

Exhibit number one involves my parents standing quietly by while my older brother exploited me when I was but a tyke. My older brother Ralph had one of the first eight

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millimeter movie projectors in our neighborhood. He had 'Little Rascal' movies and various cartoons; so on occasion he converted our garage into a movie theater, charging the kids in the neighborhood five cents to enjoy an afternoon of Hollywood's finest. Everyone had a wonderful time, of course, but if the projector broke down or the film had to be rethreaded, little BoBo had to stand up on a chair and dance for their distraction and entertainment. And where were my parents during this exploitation? Snickering as they watched from a distance if you must know. They thought it was cute.

Exhibit number two involves the time I rode my first bicycle to near disaster. What a wonderful bike it was! My brother bought it for me (you know, the one who abused me so) and taught me to ride. Well, when I was about two weeks removed from training wheels, I wanted to explore the world, but my parents were cautious, and instructed me to stay in our yard, at least until I had more experience under my belt. Not to be deterred from my mission, I left the yard to explore the highways and byways of our neighborhood. One day I let out all the stops and while flying down the street I hit a big rock and went bounding over the handlebars... right into a cactus patch. Where were my parents? Where were my parents when I so needed protection?

Exhibit number three, finally, involves my twelfth birthday. As a child I always wanted a go-cart. To me, nothing could be finer, and I longed to feel the wind's rush as I sped along, just like a NASCAR driver. Mama and daddy knew this, and a month or so before the birthday in question, mama informed me that I was getting a very special birthday present that year. No matter how much I begged and cajoled, she wouldn't tell me what it was; but finally agreed to give me one hint. "You go places in it," she said. And, believe me; that was all she needed to say. I just knew I was getting a go-cart!

Halfway through my twelfth birthday party a delivery truck pulled up outside our house. Imagine my excitement as they opened the cargo area and slowly removed... new twin beds for my brother and me. Talk about a bummer... how could parents do that to a child?

If my parents were there for me as a child, I just didn't get it. My mind focused on the things that meant the most to me, and most of them were shiny or sweet and involved pleasure. If my parents were there for me I just didn't get it... but I do now. As a child I didn't

think about the long years daddy got up a 4:00 AM to go to work, sometimes working 12-14 hours a day to provide for the family. I didn't notice when Mother scrimped and saved from her fixed household allowance to buy that little dress that my sister had to have; or to do something a little bit nice for all the kids. I just didn't get it when my parents were present at every concert, every athletic event... it didn't matter when, where, what, or why, they were there.

As a child I just didn't get it, but my parents were always there for me. In retrospect I think that is the best a parent can do; be there for and with the kids. We can't protect them from everything out in that big bad world. We can only prepare them as best we can and trust them to navigate their life successfully. There are, of course, basic necessities of life that we need to provide for our children; necessities like food and shelter. There is protection that we need to provide as best we can during their formative years, protection from the violence that threatens to invade their life at such a tender age. We need to provide them a chance to grow straight and strong, the education to mold them into well-rounded individuals, and the opportunity to soar into the world and be a meaningful part of society.

Finally, we need to provide our children with a spiritual foundation on which to build in later life. One of the most egregious short-comings of my generation, in my estimation, was the decision that we made en mass to let our children be free and make their own decisions. Let the child decide if he or she wants to be spiritual, we said. While it was not our intention to do so, we effectively took away any opportunity they had to be spiritual, because without a foundation on which to build, it's extremely difficult – if not impossible - to erect one later in life. It's not a question of brainwashing our kids; it's not a question of indoctrinating them into our way of thinking; rather, it's a question of teaching them the best we know, teaching them how to think for themselves, then giving them the freedom to build on that as they choose, or even to reject it altogether. Ownership of values and ideas is so very important. In fact, that's when kids really come into their own, when they take the values inherited from family and culture and make them their own.

The basic necessities of life; the best protection we can give, and opportunities to grow. That's what our children need. It ain't rocket science; we know *what* to do for our children.

What we can't agree on, it occurs to me, is *whom* to provide for; which kids to favor and which to ignore. We tend to draw the circle so narrowly around that small group of kids we call our own, that others are beyond our view altogether. Sure, their situation might be lamentable, but they are someone else's responsibility.

The point I would make on this Children's Sabbath is simple; we need to expand that circle, to define more broadly those kids we claim as in some sense ours. In fact, were you to ask me the question, *who are our children?* I would direct you to Luke 10. The young man could have phrased his question in this way. Instead of asking Jesus who his neighbor is, he could have asked which children are in some sense his. And Jesus' response would be the same; any child in need is your child.

In response to the man's question about his neighbor, you will remember, Jesus responds that the question is beneath a response. Anyone in need is your neighbor he says in so many words; the real question is whether you will be a neighbor. The same could be said of the kids today. Who are our children? That's a silly question; all of God's rainbow colored children are in some respect ours; we just have to decide if we will reach out to them to provide for their needs, give them that chance to grow up straight and tall, and make their way in the world.

In the movie, *A Time to Kill*, a group of jurors are taught this valuable lesson; all children are in some sense our responsibility. They finally realize that children, even children that look and act differently from them, are in some sense their children as well. Here's the scenario. Set in the deep south when Jim Crow is still very much alive, a young lawyer tries to convince a group of jurors that an adolescent black girl, brutally raped and abused by two white men, needs and deserves their protection as much as any other. They recognize the crime, but can't see how egregious it really is. So the lawyer asks them to close their eyes and imagine the scene he describes. He goes back through the horrible ordeal, describing in detail the horror this young girl endured. Then he asked them to imagine one more thing. Imagine, he says, that the young girl is white.

At this their breath catches, more than one juror feels sick, and looks of astonishment spread like wildfire. In this one act of imagination they realize that color doesn't matter. Race

doesn't matter. Class or status doesn't matter. Blood line doesn't matter. Children need protection and support, and they are responsible to provide as best they can.

The same is true for us today. Red or yellow, black or white, it makes no never mind, they are precious in God's sight; and we have been given charge of the children. It's up to us to discern a way forward that will not leave any kid behind; it's up to us to stand up and to give to the children, all God's children, the opportunity they need for life.