

And God Created Squash

Scripture Passages: Psalm 104:1-32; Matthew 18:1-5

This sermon is my shout out to all of the kids in our lives. Kids are truly great in the kingdom of God.

For the last few weeks, we've been one of the many families that's been affected by the school bus shortage in the Toronto District School Board. On our son Bastian's first day of school, the bus was an hour late to pick him up in the morning. After school, I waited and waited for him to return and the school finally called to say that the bus hadn't come after 90 minutes. I was upset as I ran to his school to make sure that he was okay. When I got there, he was playing on the playground without a care in the world.

Not much progress has been made with school buses since then. So, I've been walking to pick Bastian up every day after school and then the two of us walk to Christof's school to pick him up and then we all walk home together.

I've been frustrated because the system we rely on has broken down and I've had to unexpectedly adjust my plans to go pick up both kids from different schools. But, because of having the opportunity to experience Bastian's way of being the world, I've seen how the Spirit can work in even the most frustrating moments of our ordinary lives. Children can be the greatest of teachers.

The other day, Bastian and I were walking to Christof's school. We had oodles of time, but I kept coaxing him to walk faster so that we could just *get there*. How many of us want our children to *hurry up* when there isn't really a time constraint? What is the *there* we're getting to? According to Bastian, the *there* is *here*.

At one point, I stopped and looked back impatiently to see if Bastian was coming already. He was standing next to a flowering shrub and staring intently at something. It was a wasp. I didn't want him to get stung, so I rushed over to him and started waving my hands around saying, "Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!" Bastian burst into peals of laughter and imitated me. This has become our ritual play whenever we walk past these shrubs or see a wasp. We yell "Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!" And every time Bastian finds it just as hilarious as the first time.

In a book called *Orthodoxy*, G. K. Chesterton writes:

“[Children] always say, ‘Do it again’; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, ‘Do it again’ to the sun; and every evening, ‘Do it again’ to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that [God] has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.”

I LOVE this idea of God being younger than we. We are the ones who have grown weary and are in need of spiritual rejuvenation!

Isaiah 40:28 reads: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. She will not grow tired or weary.” I like to think that our Creator, the one who forever delights in her creative activity, did not rest because she was tired on that 7th day of creation. I like to think that she rested so that she could take pleasure in her creation. All of creation is God at play.

Consider verses 24-26 of our Psalm for this morning as evidence of God’s playfulness in creation:

How many are your works, Lord!

In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

25 There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.

26 There the ships go to and fro,
and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

You heard it right! Leviathan!! Leviathan, who later in the Bible is referred to as the “crooked serpent” associated with Satan. Leviathan, the dragon of chaos that

God has put in restraints. Leviathan, the hideous beast that arises from the sea in the book of Revelation with the word *blasphemy* branded on its many horrid heads! God originally formed the Leviathan *not* to terrorize creation, but to frolic and play within creation.

Some biblical scholars have said that the Leviathan was a crocodile – a fearful predator with the ability to surprise its prey with its tremendous agility and powerful, crushing jaws. But there have been studies that show that even the formidable crocodile likes to play. Crocodiles have been observed carrying colourful flowers in their teeth and even giving one another piggy back rides for no apparent reason other than to frolic!

The passage in Psalm 104 about the frolicking Leviathan is a glimpse of what creation looked like before the Fall when all of God’s creation is seen as good. And the goodness of God’s creation hasn’t changed. But we have a different relationship with that creation.

Do you know the word “prelapsarian”? It’s a great word that means before the Fall. Imagine what prelapsarian creation was like for us before we disobeyed God’s vision for us and life became hard. In the prelapsarian world, we were joyful gardeners at play amidst the fruits and flowers. Then we became sweaty laborers amidst the thistles and thorns. But creation hasn’t changed. Our relationship with creation shifted from one of playfulness to one of toil. It is so easy to forget how to be a child in the kingdom of God when we’ve become weary from our labors. It’s easy to forget how to exult in monotony.

Consider this beloved description of the kingdom of God that is presented to us in Isaiah 11:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

Why a child? Why does Matthew also say that children are the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven and that we should all become more like them? I don’t think it’s just because children are the lowliest or meekest or most vulnerable members of creation. I think it’s also because of their ability to play and to embrace possibility. Children have this brilliant godlikeness about them. They can imagine

the wild and weird possibility of a creation like the funky squash! Or the platypus! Or the piggybacking crocodile. Or even the possibility of a kingdom of God.

Remember the book and then movie *The Neverending Story*? When our family used to rent a VCR on special occasions, my brothers and I would always choose to watch *The Neverending Story*. It's no accident that Mike and I named our youngest son Bastian, the name of the main character in the book. Spoiler alert for those of you who don't know the story.

Bastian is a young boy - a lonely day dreamer who has lost his mother, lives with an emotionally distant father and experiences bullying at school. One day, when he is fleeing from his bullies, he takes shelter in a book shop where he is drawn to a magical book. He takes the book and ends up hiding out in his school's creepy attic where he becomes more and more engrossed in its pages. It is about a world called Fantasia that is threatened by a powerful force called "The Nothing". The Nothing moves across Fantasia, swallowing up everything it touches.

As Bastian continues to read, he finds that he has become a part of the story! Reality and fantasy have merged and mingled. He has somehow been drawn into Fantasia and is partly responsible for its salvation along with a collection of strange beings, including a rock eater and a luck dragon.

Bastian realizes that The Nothing consists of the death of imagination and whenever a child loses his or her ability to use his or her imagination, The Nothing eats up more and more of Fantasia. The book tells us that Bastian's role and the role of all children is to continue to dream of worlds like Fantasia - fantastical, magical worlds, where anything is possible.

Fantasia can also be seen as a vision of the Kingdom of God. It is also about the power of imagination to restore hope.

Being people of faith requires imagination, particularly in the face of evidence that mocks this faith. Through imagination, we can fathom God's creation as the kingdom of God that has always been and will always be. And by imagination, I don't mean participating in theological gymnastics in order to come up with clever arguments to support our beliefs. Sometimes we think too much and this stifles true imagination.

In *The House at Pooh Corner*, Pooh says to Piglet:

"Rabbit's clever." "Yes," said Piglet. "Rabbit's clever." "And he has Brain." "Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit has Brain." There was a long silence. "I suppose," said Pooh, "that that's why he never understands anything."

What I learn from Winnie the Pooh is that you don't have to be clever to understand the true nature of things – that God's creation is alive and well and that we should just lighten up and learn to play again. In play, everything is possible.

In his book simply entitled *Play*, the psychiatrist Stuart Brown talks about play as a "state of being" that is "purposeless, fun and pleasurable". He even goes so far as to call play "the purest expression of love." I love this definition. I see this in the way the Bible describes God's creative play – that God creates for the pleasure of it and that this creative play is God's purest expression of love.

And what can we do but respond with childlike wonder?

I grew up with a theologian for a father. When he was dying, one of his dear friends asked him the classic question: Why does God let bad things happen to good people? And my dad answered that the miracle is that we exist at all. Creation, life, the fact of our existence is a ridiculously generous gift from a ridiculously generous Creator.

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Which brings me, in conclusion, to communion. I don't know about you, but I've usually thought of communion as a time to repent and participate in somber reflection as I contemplate Christ's sacrifice for our sake. Preparing this sermon for World Communion Sunday has brought other thoughts to mind.

When we celebrate communion together, we receive the bountiful gift of our Creator and Redeemer. This gift gives us life in the midst of death and helps us to remember what God has always done for us. Through communion, we hope to find our spirits refreshed and our possibilities renewed as we encounter our God that is has killed death and is younger than we.