

“Marathon”

Luke 16:1-13 & Prayer for Young Persons pg. 829 of BCP

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world; Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rise and shine, girl. Eat your oatmeal. Tie your shoelace, off to school now. Catch the 1st bus, make an A+. Oh, you're home now. Pick your clothes up. Go back downstairs. Time to Practice. Be a good girl. Watch your sister. Set the table. Eat your green beans. Brush your teeth now.

Did you get that?

This is from a dance sequence called “A Child’s World” performed by the Tennessee Children’s Dance Ensemble. It is the last dance in a five dance sequence, and it is about the reality of a child’s world. This particular dance in the sequence is called “Marathon.”

After these words are said, there is a fast drumbeat that keeps going for several minutes. Dancers run on and off the stage in pairs, stopping to do a technique, then rushing back off stage. There are two “wondergirls” in the front who do every single technique with every single pair of dancers—the ultimate high achievers.

We live in a society that tells us and our children that our worth is based on what we are able to accomplish, failure is bad, perfection is everything, and the more you can do, the busier you are, the more important you must be. These secular ideals have a way of seeping into our bones, pulsing through our bodies, and convincing our minds to live in this busy way.

I have not rehearsed nor performed this dance Marathon in over 15 years, but as soon as I hear the music, my body responds. I can still remember “my technique.” I think our ways of life are like this muscle memory. We get into a groove, and our bodies respond without us even having to think about it too much. We just go. Like that old Nike ad, we “just do it.”

As children and adults it is hard to work against this rhythm of life, which surrounds us at every turn. We often times get lost in the madness, the groove of our just doing it. But, our souls sometimes find a space to get our attention, and remind us that amidst all this chaos and secularism, we deeply desire to raise Christian children with the values of Christ.

So somewhere between or within rise and shine girl and brush your teeth now, we hope God is meeting all of us, especially our children and youth where we are in our lives, stirring our souls, reminding us of His presence and companionship, His love.

We hope our children know on a deep level that God loves them, and we love them. We hope we are helping them grow in a rich and abiding faith that not only centers them in God's love and mercy, but also teaches them to lean on their faith in times of need as they grow older. So, when the world is being unsteady and confusing as it often is, they are centered in God and His love.

I don't know about you, but I find as an adult I have a hard time with this too. I am often swept away by the responsibilities before me at work, with my family, the house, friends and own needs. Cell phone ringing, unanswered emails, need more organic baby food, piles of laundry... I could write my own "marathon lyrics."

Sometimes I worry if I am role-modeling for Aidan what I am hoping and praying for him. Who else will teach him that God's ways gives more life than the ways of the world, and that following God is better than chasing after selfish goals. If not me, who will teach him to take failure, not as a measure of his worth, but as a chance for a new start? Who will illustrate the strength to hold his faith in you, God, and to keep alive his joy in your creation?

Herein lies the good news—we are not alone. Christ was intentional in his teachings that we walk together as Christians. It is together that we teach not only our children but each other as adults that God's ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following God is better than chasing after selfish goals. Together we help our children and each other take failure, not as a measure of our worth, but as a chance for a new start. Together we give our children and each other strength to hold our faith in you, God, and to keep alive our joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I can become unglued when I think about all the stresses that are on us and our children—this unsteady and confusing world we live in. I get upset thinking about all the negative influences vying for my child's attention. And, I can really get passionate about wanting to do something about it! Not only for our children and youth, but all children and youth in our community. As Christians we are called to serve God by helping our children have and keep their faith in Him and by showing them that God's ways give more life than the ways of the world.

Our gospel reading today speaks to a man who is trying to serve God and at the same time serve one of the main tenants of secularism: wealth. And, the last line of the Gospel reading sums it up: You cannot serve God and wealth. We cannot serve God and wealth. We cannot serve God and secularism.

This is all great and all. And, it rings true to our Christian ears and hearts, but what does that really look like in our every day lives? As adults, as children of faith? Do we sell all our possessions and give all our money away?

To be honest with you, I do not know exactly what it means or what it looks like. But, I do know we are to wrestle with this together. We are not supposed to say, "I don't know. Let's move on." We need to wrestle with it together. And, again the key word here is together. We need each other to figure out how we live as Christians called to serve God in a secular world. We have always needed each other, and we always will. Alone we cannot take a stand for ourselves nor our children nor God.

How does God show His children that His ways give more life than the ways of the world? He shows us and our children through education about His word and the life and death of Christ. He shows us through the way we treat each other. He instructs us through the experiences we have in life and the way He meets us in those. He shows us by walking TOGETHER in faith. By watching Christ grow in each other.

And, today, we are commissioning key players in our parish who help us answer our prayers—our directors, commissioners, teachers, helpers, and leaders of Christian Education. Faith does not just happen. It takes study, prayer, experiences, and sacred space to openly discuss. It takes people who are dedicated to teaching all of us about Christ, theology, the stories of the Bible, the songs of our tradition, how to pray. We are a blessed congregation, indeed, to have so many people coming forward to give of their time, their talents, and their energy to serve God and us.

Our nursery teachers are going to be implementing a curriculum with our newest, smallest members! Have you ever watched how children love to sing—how their eyes twinkle as they sing along to a song? Our children are going to twinkle with the curriculum prepared for them. I'd like to take a moment and say that I hope all of you will consider working in the nursery at some time. We need to show our tinies God's love, warmth and care like nothing they will experience anywhere else! Here, at Church of the Ascension, they are honored as our newest members of the Body of Christ. Their Christian education begins not in Sunday School but in the nursery.

Our Catechesis teachers are on fire for teaching children about God and faith. Every time I am in a meeting with them, I want to get trained as a Catechist too! They talk about how much they learn along with the kids. How amazing it is to watch things click in the children's minds and hearts. The "Ahhhh" moments are priceless!

And, children have the added opportunity to be together to learn and worship in Kid's Worship during the 10:30 service.

We have had four new adults step forward this Fall to teach in our Youth Sunday School rooms. Thank you! And, we have six faithful, returning youth teachers. Thank you! All of these people showing up every Sunday ready to teach lessons of the Bible, have discussions about faith and to build relationships with our young people.

This commissioning is a celebration of an incredible blessing—we are commissioning 58 individuals today! Some in spirit because they could not be here, but 58 people! Ya'll this is big. This is the gospel, the good news meeting us in our parish right now. As Christians we are walking our faith together.

And, today we recognize, honor, thank and commission our teachers who by their example, leadership and teaching show that God's ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following God is better than chasing our selfish goals. We are helping each other take failure, not as a measurement of our worth, but as a chance for a new start. We give each other strength to hold on to our faith in God, and to keep alive our joy in God's amazing creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *AMEN.*