

"Raising Our Inner Child"

Sermon Preached at Foundry United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dean J. Snyder

Mother's Day

May 11, 2003

Ephesians 6:1-4

John 10:11-18

Inside of each of us is an inner child. No matter how old we are, no matter how accomplished, no matter how dignified we seem, inside of each one of us lives an inner child.

I was first exposed to this concept in a book written by a professor of psychiatry from the University of Ohio 40 years ago.. Hugh Missildine entitled his book, "Your Inner Child of The Past."

This concept that there is a child of the past who lives inside of us and still influences and interrupts our adult life today is on the top-ten list of the key ideas that have influenced my own thinking, my ministry and the way I live my life.

None of us comes through childhood without bruises, scars, distortions, hurt. All of us were shaped and, in some way or another, twisted by the circumstances of our childhood and, because it happened to us at a time when we could not rationally and intellectually think through what was happening to us, this irrational child lives inside of us all the days of our life. She or he whispers in our inward ear. In situations of stress, when we are tired, when were at critical points in our life and are nervous or uneasy or ill, this inward, often irrational child can take over.

Every person has an inner child. It doesn't matter whether you're a partner in your firm, whether you're the CEO, whether people call you Doctor, Reverend or Most Reverend. If you were ever a child, the inner child of your past still lives within you.

Our inner child never dies and never grows up. Psychotherapy, introspection and study can help us understand our inner child better, but our inner child never grows up, never goes vaway, never dies.

This Mother's Day I want to limit myself to saying two about our inner child of the past -- two implications of understanding that there is an inner child who lives within us.

The first thing I want to say is that if we understand that every human being who is an adult has an inner child of the past living within them, then we have to understand how absolutely important the ministry of churches to children and families is.

Today in our church, Sunday school, nursery, toddlers class and our kindergarten we are shaping inner children who are going to be living inside of the adults who will be running the world 50 years from now. The way we treat children in the church of Jesus Christ today is perhaps the most important thing that we can do to shape the future of our world.

Over the years of my ministry I have run into too many adults who believed rationally and theologically that God loves them - they believed theologically in a God of love, who loved them and cared about them,

forgave and accepted them - but inside of those rational, theologically, sophisticated adults there was an inner child of the past who found it almost impossible to believe in God's love. Because of what they had experienced as children.

I think that there's no more important ministry of the church of Jesus Christ than our ministry to children. We're shaping inner children who will live inside the adults they become.

When I was a honorary lay person, when I was on conference staffs and didn't have a pulpit and sat in the congregation the way you do, at the last church that Jane and I attended the thing that I volunteered to do was to organize the church nursery. The pastor announced Sunday after Sunday that he needed someone to organize the church nursery. I got irritated and said to myself, Why won't someone get off their duff and volunteer to organize the nursery!

One Sunday during the anthem God said to me, *Yo, Snyder*. God said, *What in the whole world could be a better use of your time than to make sure that children experience my love?*

I want three things to happen to every child who comes through the door of Foundry Church. I want them to know that God loves them unconditionally. No matter how their life turns out, I want their inner child to know that God loves them. I want their inner child to know that God loves them.

Secondly, I want them to know that they are special ... special in the eyes of God and in the eyes of this congregation.

The third thing that I want them to know is that there is potential within them, that God has placed within them, gifts and graces so if they develop what God has placed within them, that they can serve God, all the days of their life.

You may have noticed in the FOCUS that we're looking for a worker for our nursery. For many, many years Ruth Weber, who died recently, coordinated our nursery. It was her ministry. Bill and Ruth Weber, went to a Lutheran church on Capital Hill, and when their Lutheran church closed, Bill and Ruth came here and Ruth devoted herself to the children of our nursery.

We really miss Ruth. I've been praying - Lord, do it again. Close another Lutheran church some where and send someone else like Ruth here.

We're shaping inner children today and inner children need to know God's love.

The second thing I want to suggest this morning is this: We have inner children inside of us. I want to suggest this morning that we ought to treat the inner children inside of us the same way that God calls us to treat the children here at Foundry church, the same way God calls us to treat our daughters and sons, our nieces and nephews, the children we teach in school, all the children who are part of our lives.

In a time and a culture when children were perceived to be the property of their parents and parents could do anything they wanted to children, including throw them away, what the early church taught was this: the early church said, *Fathers (and it could have said fathers and mothers) fathers and mothers, do not provoke your children to anger.* Ephesians 6: 4)

Do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord.

I think that that's the way that we need to treat not only the children around us but the inner child within us. We need to learn how to treat the child inside ourselves gently, and how not to provoke him or her but to discipline the child inside of ourselves gently.

I learned a lot about my mother's inner child of the past when she got Alzheimer's. During the time of her illness, there was a period where her inner child came out and took over, and I realize that, as calm, caring, attentive as my mother had been, inside of her there was an inner child with a past who, for whatever reason, was very, very scared.

My mother lived in a community where the local fire company would run its siren every noon. As her Alzheimer's worsened, every noon she would panic and become convinced that the house was burning down. Every noon, even though I lived a hundred miles away, every noon when that siren rang, she would run through the house looking for me, to save me.

This scared child came out in my mother during this stage of her Alzheimer's, and it helped me understand her so much better. It also helped me understand my own inner child: As a child, I always felt like I just couldn't quite do quite enough to make my mother happy. I felt that there was something wrong with me so that I just could not please her.

The inner child, who felt inadequate to please my mother, still lives inside of me today and whispers in my ear and from time to time takes over my life. I have learned that I need to be careful not to provoke my inner child. I need to treat my inner child gently. My inner child needs to have a long walk or a bicycle ride every day. My inner child needs to have eight glasses of water a day. My inner child needs to have lunch sometime between noon and 2:00 everyday.

I need to make sure that I treat my inner child gently or my inner child gets started to get anxious, and I start to try to over-perform to make my mother happy, and most of the mistakes I've made in my life, I've made was I was trying to over-perform. I need to not provoke my inner child. I need to reassure my inner child. I need to discipline my inner child gently in the spirit of the Lord.

I need to be my own inner child's mother, now. We need to raise our inner child gently and not provoke him, not provoke her.

One more thing: I believe that the really powerful spiritual experiences we have in our lives, the most important ones, are not the ones we have as rational adults.

Our most important spiritual experiences are when God somehow manages to get through our adult, in-control, mature, sophisticated, accomplished selves to our inner child. When God can get past our adult selves and touch the nervous, anxious and inadequate inner child inside, those are the spiritual experiences that transform and save us.

I think this is what Jesus meant when he said that we could not enter the kingdom of heaven, unless we enter it as children (Mark 10: 15).

It is our inner child that enters the kingdom of heaven. This is why we baptize babies, because God doesn't love just the you who has managed to get your life together and function as a more-or-less together adult. God loves the inner child in you. God loves the irrational inner child in you and in me.

Let us let God touch the inner child within, our inner child of the past.