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***Matthew 11:25* At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.**

Jesus praises God in verse 25 for hiding “these things” from the wise and learned and revealing them to little children (or infants, in some translations). We can summarize these “things” he’s referring to as spiritual truths or blessings, or the way to connect with God’s love. Jesus refers to children numerous times in the Bible, often in inclusive, positive ways: inviting them to come to him in the midst of disciples trying to exclude them, and describing “faith like a child” as the way to receive the kingdom of God, rather than relying on one’s credentials, status or merit.

As a veteran elementary art teacher, I pride myself on well-planned lessons that tie in historical & contemporary artists, styles and techniques. I rely on my credentials in art education, and my network of other art teachers and academic resources to keep me apprised of art trends and tried-and-true methods of success in the art room. Armed with my degrees and numerous years of teaching experience, I perfect my lesson plan, purchase and prepare all the supplies and mentally walk through each part of each class for all my grade levels. I think ahead about potential problems, how kids will get their materials, how they will clean up, and what they will do if they finish early. I arrive in the morning and get to work, setting everything up for the day. I know it will be perfect!

Then the real, actual children arrive. Some come in and sit the way I’ve taught them, attentive and ready to make art. Some ask to leave the room immediately for

a bathroom visit, or a drink. A few are still upset about some recess drama and the youngest ones usually find a bead or some kind of trash-treasure on the floor and I've lost their attention before we even start. The paint gets spilled, the marker lids lost, and then a chorus of that refrain known to trigger art teachers around the world: "I'm doooooone" - ...and there's 30 mins of class left. My perfectly planned lesson has become a train off the tracks and sometimes I'm left asking myself, "What just happened?" After spending the hour cleaning messes, hearing tattles, convincing the perfectionists that they DON'T need a new sheet of paper because they can work around their mistake, I sometimes end the day questioning my expertise.

Then the next morning, I pull all the paintings off the drying rack and start to notice some of the magic that is children's art. Those creative individual details that I didn't have time to notice during class...that student who took things in a completely different direction because they think outside the box, the exceptional shading on the quiet student's work. Some days, I'll lead a discussion about an artwork, and a normally sullen student shares an interpretation I'd never considered and gets the class thinking and debating. I'll overhear older students showing their younger sibling their art on display in the hallway, and telling them all about their idea and process, really taking ownership of their art.

Children have a way of connecting to truths in a pure, uninhibited way that adults sometimes can't. My students aren't tethered to academic understandings of art, or rules about what is good or the right way to make their art. They teach ME time and time again how to approach art (and life) with fresh eyes, new perspectives, and an unbridled love of expressing themselves just for fun. Even Picasso noted that it took him "4 years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child".

Picasso was alluding to that raw, honest vibe that students bring to their art before they grow up and start questioning themselves.

So as we widen the lens from children's approaches to art, we can examine qualities of childlike approaches to life and questions of faith. We are advised by Jesus to seek God's Wisdom with the eyes and heart of a child. Not by relying on our education, experience and worldly wisdom. But with simplicity, vulnerability, sincerity, honesty. So how do we do that?

Jesus goes on in Matthew 11 to invite us to bring our burdens to him.

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus uses an analogy of an oxen yoke where working **together** lessens the load for each worker. As adults, we often have trouble asking for help or sharing our burdens. At work, we are expected to solve problems, coordinate, delegate, produce. At home, it's the same – schedule, clean, fix, parent – adulting is hard. Asking for help or even just sharing the stress of adulting can be challenging for some of us. We don't want to appear weak or embarrass ourselves. Will we lose our authority or respect by asking for help? For some of us, even pausing to process WHY we are stressed or snapping at our families or feeling alone can be difficult – who has the time to pause and reflect when there are lunches to pack, deadlines to meet and appointments to make? We are weary and burdened.

In his book “Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time”, author Marcus Borg includes a chapter titled “Jesus, Compassion and Politics”. He defines compassion

as “feeling the feelings of somebody else in a visceral way” or “feeling the suffering of somebody else and being moved by that suffering to do something”. Borg goes on to describe Jesus’s view of compassion as “the central quality of God and central moral quality of a life centered in God” (46). We see this emphasis on compassion in Jesus’s ministry to the outcasts of society and his fellowship with the marginalized.

In the classroom, most of my students are not afraid to ask for help. They ask constantly, sometimes immediately and all at once. But some of my favorite moments happen when I’m busy helping someone else. Classmates begin helping each other - whether it’s comforting someone who’s frustrated, giving tips on a drawing, or grabbing the recycling bin to assist a friend who’s made a huge mess. Children see a friend who is overwhelmed and needs compassion and they step in.

My own kids are amazing at this, though admittedly they gear their compassion more towards animals than humans. My son Elliott recently saved a horseshoe crab by moving a literal boulder it was stuck under. I had given up and discouraged him from trying because I was afraid it would end badly and make him more upset but he set his mind to do it and spent a good chunk of his afternoon at the beach digging it free. My daughter Evelyn was known as a spider-saver in her school. Even as far back as third grade, she won the “green goddess” award for saving all the creepy crawlies in the school. My kids are full of compassion: “feeling the suffering of somebody else and being moved by that suffering to do something”.

As a teacher and mom, I’ve witnessed countless moments of children noticing a need, feeling compassion and acting as a burden-sharer. Offering their aide, in the observant, uncomplicated, sincere way that children have. Jesus doesn’t promise to make our burdens disappear or tell us life is easy. Just that we don’t have to be

alone. He offers us rest and his yoke which is easy and a burden that is light. He offers to team up with us. We can ask for help. We can also BE his helper by offering compassion to others. To more intentionally notice a need, feel the suffering and be moved to DO something. Jesus is reminding us that we aren't alone but must have the wisdom of little children to slow down, notice our needs and those of others and share burdens to lighten the collective load. With the eyes of a child, may we seek connection to His Wisdom and Spirit of Love. Amen

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