

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD US

Rev. Sylvia L. Howe
© December 18, 2005

First Parish Church
Unitarian Universalist
225 Cabot Street
Beverly, MA 01938

READINGS

Nelda Quigley

First Coming by Madeleine L'Engle

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till people and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine. He did not wait

till hearts were pure. In joy he came
to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Our Responsibility by Barbara Grizzuti Harrison

Our awesome responsibility to ourselves, to our children, and to the future is to create ourselves in the image of goodness, because the future depends on the nobility of our imaginings.

HOMILY

Have you noticed the Wayside Pulpit question on the front of the building? *And how are the children?* It's a Masai greeting. When the Masai meet each other, instead of saying *Hello*, they ask after the children, *Kasserian Ingera*. Even those with no children ask the question. Even the warriors, the old women, the old men, the unmarried girls inquire about the welfare of the children. And the response? *The children are well. The children are well.*

These past few weeks, I've been thinking about the Christmas story. I've been thinking about the fact that throughout Christendom we pause to celebrate the birth of a baby. A newborn child of an unwed mother and an older father, surrounded by cattle, sheep, shepherds, and angels who, the story goes, lives to change the course of the world. But it is the baby that intrigues me. A tiny baby, a helpless infant who is held before us as a symbol of God's love made manifest in the world. A beautiful placid, clean, quiet baby serenely held in his mother's arms while his father lovingly looks on. It would be easy to ask the question, *And how is this child?* For we know the story. He is Emmanuel, God among Us. Who among us does not love this imagery?

But what would happen if we went a little further. What if we imagined this child, not as a babe in a manger but as an inconsolable infant shrieking for we know not what, or a two-year old throwing a temper tantrum in the middle of a grocery aisle, or a pierced, tattoo-covered teenager, or a down-on-her-luck thirty-five year old returning to her parents nest until she gets back on her feet. These images of the beloved child are not nearly as wonderful or inspiring as those of the child lying in a manger. But, in fact, these images are more like what our children are. They are real kids with runny noses, skinned knees, disorganized lives and wanting to be loved and respected. They are real kids with beautiful smiles, giggling voices, focused energy and wanting to be loved and respected.

Despite the reality of our children's lives, we still need to ask the question, *And how are the children?* For they too can be called Emmanuel, God among Us. The question is a question, not only about the children, but about Life itself.

When the Masai greet each other by asking after the children they acknowledge the high value on their children's well-being. Their response, *the children are well* assures the listener that peace reigns and the priorities of protecting the young, the powerless, the least of these, are established and in place. Isn't that what Jesus, when he grew to be a man, proclaimed? Isn't that what we, as Unitarian Universalists, envision when we speak of the Beloved Community of Love and Justice?

Can you imagine what might happen if every time we greeted each other we asked, *And how are the children?*

Do you think it might make a difference in the way we thought of how we perceive our children and the world's children. Do you think if each adult among us, everyone, those with and without children, asked the question at least twice a day, do you think we might all feel a greater responsibility and appreciation for our children?

Do you think it might make a difference if we heard the mayor ask the question as he opened each gathering at City Hall? Do you think it might make a difference if all the government leaders in our city, in our state, in our country, in the world asked at least once a day, *And how are the children?*

Do you think it might make a difference if each Sunday, right after we sang our opening hymn we turned to each other and asked *And how are the children? And how are the children?*

How long do you think it would take for all of us, you and me; the leaders and citizens of Beverly, of Massachusetts, of the United States, of the world, how long would it take for us to be truly able to respond, *The children are well, all the children are well.* How long will it take for us to realize that God is among us and that we are the children of God? How long will it take? How long will it take? *Amen*

RESOURCES: 1999 UUA Reach Packet from a sermon by Rev. Dr. Patrick T. O'Neill