

In 1988 Rev. Robert Fulghum first published the book “All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.” This title is taken from his first essay in the book where Robert lists lessons normally learned in kindergarten and explains how the world would be improved if adults adhered to these same rules. Robert says: “These are the things I learned (in Kindergarten):

1. Share everything.
2. Play fair.
3. Don't hit people.
4. Put things back where you found them.
5. CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESS.
6. Don't take things that aren't yours.
7. Say you're SORRY when you HURT somebody.
8. Wash your hands before you eat.
9. Flush.
10. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
11. Live a balanced life - learn some and drink some and draw some

and paint some and sing and dance and play and work every day  
some.

12. Take a nap every afternoon.

13. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold  
hands, and stick together.

14. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam  
cup? The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really  
knows how or why, but we are all like that.

15. Goldfish and hamster and white mice and even the little seed in  
the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.

16. And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word  
you learned - the biggest word of all - LOOK.”

If we take Robert at face value and assume that everything we need  
to know we've already learned in kindergarten, then why do we  
bother with the rest of life? Is the rest of our lives simply repetition  
of what we already know?

I couldn't help but think of Robert's book when I was pondering today's gospel lesson. In Luke's pericope today we get a second reading about John the Baptist in two weeks. In fact, today's reading is a continuation of last week's. In these verses we see John first warn the crowds, followed by a call to action, and then concludes with the announcement of the Messiah.

What particularly caught my attention this week was how rather boring and uneventful John's call to action is in comparison to his warning and announcement. Here gathered around John are groups of Jews who were collaborators with Rome. These people – the tax collectors and the soldiers – were exploiting their own people for their individual gain. Yet these people came out to be baptized by John. These people came to hear John preach a baptism of repentance – a baptism of turning from their ways towards something new.

Then those same people ask, “What should we do after we repent?” John basically says: be honest, be kind, and work hard. Be honest and don’t collect more money than you should. Be kind and share when you have and someone else doesn’t. Be hard working and don’t try to get more than you deserve.<sup>1</sup> Basically John says, go and do everything you learned in kindergarten. John says there action is a response to repentance. This message that John proclaims will be a central message for the whole gospel of Luke that we’ll explore this year. Luke’s message will be a challenge to us believers to put our faith into practice more fully.

We’ve seen this challenge before. It’s not new. In fact following the massacre in San Bernardino, California we’ve seen this debate take national stage. The headline for New York Daily News following the shooting on December 3rd read: “God isn’t fixing this,” and the paper posted tweets of prayer for the victims from Republican candidates. To be clear, I’m not here to make a political statement

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/12/advent-3-c-ordinary-saints/>

about Republicans or Democrats. However, I am intrigued by what's been dubbed "prayer shaming."

Much like John the Baptist we as Christians might realize that God's call to us is more than words. One writer for the Washington Post says, "Perhaps the No. 1 problem with prayer shaming is that it misunderstands the purpose of prayer. As any prayerful person will tell you, God isn't a wish-granting genie. [We] don't pray because [we] expect God to make [our] lives — or the world — perfect. [We] make requests, sure, but [we] understand that God might have different plans. Mostly [we] pray for God to influence *[us]*, not the other way around. So, it makes little sense to stop praying because the results aren't always good; that's not the point."<sup>2</sup>

"Prayer without action is just illogical. The situation calls for principle *and* practice. After San Bernardino, many are echoing what President Obama said in October, following a different mass

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/03/the-hypocrisy-of-prayer-shaming-after-san-bernardino/>

shooting: 'Our thoughts and prayers are not enough.' He's right, of course. When Noah knew the flood was coming, he didn't just pray for the rain to stop. He built the ark. In the same way, lawmakers shouldn't hide behind prayer, using it as an excuse to do nothing else. But the fact that prayer *alone* won't stop mass shootings doesn't mean it has no place in times of tragedy."<sup>3</sup>

Much like those gathered around for a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John says repentance and response go together, just like prayer and action go together. So too the Christian philosopher Michael Stark goes on to say, "There is something we need to learn about ourselves, and each other, when we truly pray. If we are constantly praying about issues, whether personal or social, and we cease to change, we ought to reexamine the nature of our prayers and our reason for prayer. Prayer is action. And prayer needs to lead to further outward action with the focus on alleviating hurt and suppressing evil. [As] Pope Francis [recently said], "You

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/03/the-hypocrisy-of-prayer-shaming-after-san-bernardino/>

pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That's how prayer works."<sup>4</sup>

And I think that presents us a unique opportunity to think about our lives. Why do we pray for the same thing time and again? Why do we gather here every week to essentially hear the same thing, namely that God loves you; God's gifts are free; and that we're called to respond to others with love? Why the same thing, every sermon, nothing new? Why do we bother if nothing seems to change?

We bother because we don't really get it. Time and again this world brings us down and tries to convince us that we are unlovable, useless, and have no impact on the world. Here in this place you're reminded of the things we hopefully learned in kindergarten – you are loved, and you are set free to love. We're reminded, and then we're sent to respond. Church, prayer, and repentance are the important first steps. Step two is putting it into action. Step one is being reminded that being honest, kind, and hardworking do make a

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-stark/prayer-alone-is-not-enoug\\_b\\_8705834.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-stark/prayer-alone-is-not-enoug_b_8705834.html)

difference in an impatient, immature, and fearful word. Step two is giving of your offering to support the advocacy efforts of the ELCA in Springfield and D.C. Step one is being reminded that, as one recent study shows, kindness and honesty actually breed kindness and honesty.<sup>5</sup> Step two is helping to make our worship hospitable so that people who come here can hear step one. Step one is praying for the lonely, and step two is turning that into visiting our lonely neighbor. Step two is putting into action everything you already learned in kindergarten, in worship, and in the bible.

Sometimes step one is the hardest step as well. When we ask questions like, “What does it really look like to love your neighbor?” And, “Who is your neighbor?” These are some of the questions we gather to discern here in worship. We come to be reminded that the Israelites were foreigners and as such we should treat foreigners well. We’re reminded that Jesus was a refugee. And then from those reminders we act to support refugees of all faiths – Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu. We are then called into action to

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wired.com/2010/03/kindness-spreads/>



support Refugee One during our Advent Project. We are called to put into action everything we already learned .... perhaps in kindergarten.

Friends, John the Baptist's call to action is nothing new – it's might even be everything that we learned in kindergarten – he says be honest, be kind, and be hardworking. John's call though today reminds us that our lives of faith are more than words - they are also actions. Step one is being reminded and being discerning together.

Our actions are step two in helping to participate in God's incarnation in the world. We're told that these exhortations in Luke are "good news" to our ears. They're good news for with these actions we're able to catch glimpses of God's reign. They're good news as we proclaim God's grace and love to all people. They're good news because of the one who is coming. Amen.