

“Lost in Legoland”

Matthew 18:1-14

Series: The Experiment Week 6. Blessed are the Pure in Heart

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hogle

The Woodside Church

June 9, 2019

Recently I went on a journey to a wondrous, magical land. Lisa and I took our grandson’s Ben and Isaac to the Legoland Discovery Center. I loved to play with Legos when I was a boy. Back then, we had basically two colors – white and red. Now they have more than 60. Here are some other Lego facts

- 4,680,000 LEGO pieces are made per hour.
- Every second, 7 LEGO sets are sold around the world.
- The LEGO bricks sold in one year can wrap around Earth five times.
- The world’s tallest LEGO tower has 550,000 LEGO bricks and stands 114’ tall.
- “LEGO” is a fusion of the two Danish words “leg” (play) and “godt” (good).
- The plural of LEGO is “LEGO.”
- There are over 400 billion LEGO bricks in the world. Stacked together, they are 2,386,065 miles tall, which is ten times farther than the moon.

The Discovery Center has a choo-choo train equipped with lasers, a triple-decker pirate ship, and a 4D theater where they pelt you with wind, water and slime.

At one station you can build a race car and compete with other kids. I encouraged the boys to build their own jalopies. Then I thought, just to be supportive, I’d build one too. Of course I needed to scour the piles for the right pieces. I dug through the bins to grab the parts that would make mine perfectly aerodynamic. Naturally I had to convince my grandsons why they didn’t need those tires or windshields or that cool spoiler for their cars. For some reason they wouldn’t let go of their Legos. Finally when we raced them down the track I was there at the finish line to comfort them when my sleek Lego Lamborghini crushed their lame Lego Yugos.

Okay – maybe I got a little carried away.

But don’t worry – my grandsons got their revenge. Whenever I tried to build a tall Lego tower Hurricane Ben and Cyclone Isaac played their favorite game: KABOOM!

Legos are about one thing: building. In fact, the centerpiece of Lego Discovery Center is a scale model of buildings in Philadelphia including City Hall, the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, Rocky running up the Art Museum steps and the Linc where you can see a reenactment of the double-doink kick.

Why are Legos so popular? They've clicked with a key need inside each of us: to build. Over a lifetime, we build a record, build a resume, build a family, build a home, build a body of work, build a reputation, build a retirement, build a legacy.

Building is not bad. Where would our world be without the builders? How could we survive if each of us did not contribute our bricks to build our community? The trouble comes when building becomes my be all and end all. I might build to impress you, build to please you, build to compete with you, build to beat you. I invest my entire life in building my little Legoland as a lasting monument to my ego and then what happens? Someone or something comes along and plays KABOOM! And all I'm left with are pieces...pieces which, in the end, all go back in a box.

It's easy to get lost in legoland. It happens when my heart is filled with the wrong kind of bricks. Jesus says,

“But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” Matthew 15:18-19

It's the thoughts – the impure plans, schemes, and designs drawn up in the heart which cause the bridge between husband and wife to collapse, the tower of a career to crumble, the home of a family to be crushed. If we want to live a blessed life and build it God's way, Jesus says, we need to clean out and unclutter our hearts. That is why the sixth Beatitude says:

“Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.” Matthew 5:8

In the ancient world, the heart is the source of your character and conscience. It is the place where your thoughts and desires, your wisdom and will reside. This is why Proverbs warns us:

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Proverbs 4:23

Your heart is the core of you. When Egyptians performed mummification, the only organ they left in body was the heart. Thinking the brain a waste of space, they threw it away. On the wall in my office is a papyrus painting of a Duat. When a person dies, Egyptians believe they go to the underworld where the heart is placed on one pan of a scale while a feather is laid on the other. If sin in the heart exceeds the weight of a feather, Ammit the hungry Baboon gobbles up the heart thus preventing you from entering the afterlife. If your heart is pure, sin free, lighter than a feather, you go to eternal life to see your god.

Is this what Jesus means when He says the pure in heart will see God? Many still cling to the three thousand year old belief that if the good they do outweighs the bad they will gain admission to heaven. Jesus, however, is not talking about the hereafter but the

here and now. The Beatitudes are building blocks for the blessed life. If you've been trying these experiments each week you may be experiencing the following blueprint.

- The Poor in Spirit who admit they don't deserve to be in God's kingdom find He's prepared a place for them.
- This causes them to Mourn and become truly sorry for their sins. Yet God folds them in His comforting arms.
- So they Humble themselves in the presence of God and He lifts them up and puts them in His family.
- This moves them to Hunger and Thirst to do what's right in His eyes.
- Which leads them to Purify their Hearts, get rid of the distractions, so they can see what He is doing and join Him.

When our hearts are set on building up our own little lego kingdoms, we are too blind to see the kingdom God is building around us.

The disciples are lost in their own legolands. When they ask Jesus to identify who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, they hope He will designate one of them as His second in command. They want the Master to clearly diagram for them the corporate hierarchy of His new kingdom. Instead, Jesus turns and calls to His side a little girl. As Jesus places her in the center of their dispute, they begin, one-by-one, to quiet their arguments and stare at the child. The disciples tower over her, enveloping the little one in shadow. Her up-turned face and wide-eyed curiosity match their confused silence. After they've taken a moment to ponder the tot, Jesus says simply,

“Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18: 4

Now before you assume that this is just a sweet precious moment, consider this: children had no rights, no protection, no authority, no power, no income, no expertise, no training, no education, no skills. Children were on the lowest rung of a downtrodden and oppressed people. What qualifies her, or any child, to be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom?

Some say children are the greatness because little ones are so pure and free from any wrong. They are, of course, referring to hypothetical children. The real ones are not so spotless. Someone has said, “The trouble with children is that one moment they can give you a lump in the throat and the next minute a pain in the neck.” Listen to these “Ten Commandments of a Toddler”:

1. If I like it, it's mine.
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.

3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.
6. If I'm building something, all the pieces are mine.
7. If it looks just like mine, it's mine.
8. If I saw it first, it's mine.
9. If you are playing with something and put it down, it automatically becomes mine.
10. If it's broken, it's yours.

The truth is, children are self-centered, but no more so than teens or adults. They just don't have as much power to get what they want.

And perhaps that's why Jesus chooses a child as the picture of greatness in His kingdom. Children are powerless and dependent on us. They look to us for guidance and protection, shelter and nurture, security, comfort and love. "I tell you the truth," Jesus says to the disciples, "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (v. 3).

How do you have a pure heart? First, ***Let Him Check Your Heart***. The Greek word in this verse for 'humble' or 'lowly position' was originally used to describe the leveling of a hill or mountain or maybe a Lego Tower. In other words, we can't play 'king of the mountain' and follow Christ at the same time. You and I must come down from the lofty heights and start over at the beginning. Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). God cannot do much with us when we think we are too intellectually sophisticated to acknowledge He exists, too impressed with our resumes to admit we need Him, too focused on our goals to follow His, too distracted and blinded by things here on earth to see His face, too stressed and busy to listen for His voice, too worried about getting the glory instead of giving it to Him. Check what's in your heart. A good checklist is the seven deadlies: Do I find in my heart any trace of greed or glutton, lust or laziness, envy, anger or ego?

Those who allow the Lord to bring them down off the mountain, those who are willing to start on the ground floor with God, find a new kingdom waiting. It's a kingdom of kids who have one Father, who follow one Lord, who are filled with one Spirit. Greatness in this kingdom is not measured by your position, your possessions, your usefulness, your significance, your experience or your authority. Greatness in this kingdom requires you and I to humbly depend on God.

It takes simple love and trust in our Father. Kids will hop in the car without knowing where their parents plan to take them. They instinctively reach out a hand when crossing the street. They come running to Mom or Dad when they feel up and when they fall down. And at the end of the day, they trust their parents to take them home. You and I need that kind of relationship with God. Trust Him enough to follow where He leads, to hold His hand when crossing dangerous paths. Run to Him when you are filled with joy or sorrow. And trust Him to take you home at the end of your days. The way to enter His Kingdom is to turn and humble yourself like a child. Check your heart.

The second step to enter the kingdom ***Let Him Clean Your Heart***. Now that we feel all warm and fuzzy about becoming kids of the kingdom, Jesus hits us with one of the most grotesque passages in the New Testament.

Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. (Matthew 18:7-9).

Why would Jesus command us to commit such horrid acts of mutilation? I cannot believe for one minute the Lord, who created our eyes, hands and feet, intends us to destroy them. Besides, if the only way to enter the kingdom is by cutting off every offending part of our bodies, there would be nothing left to walk through the heavenly gates.

And that's His point! Jesus uses this very grotesque and graphic image to drive home this truth: there is no way we can save ourselves. The religions of the world, and many Christians as well, believe if you just try harder you can free yourself from sin. Practice a few more rituals, break a few bad habits, say a few more prayers and God will welcome you into His kingdom. There are even some extremists who punish their bodies to please God. Jesus point? Sin is so serious, so unstoppable, so woven into the fabric of our beings that the only way you can get rid of it is to cut it off. Or you can admit you are completely helpless and let Him take sin from you, let Him take the punishment for you, let Him cleanse your heart. In the next chapter it says,

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:25-26

I have never know a cardiologist to work on his or her own heart. We all need the Great Physician to clean out our clogged arteries and make our hearts pure.

And finally, *Let Him Open the Eyes of Your Heart*. Jesus rounds out this lesson with a third surprising story. He paints a crazy picture of a shepherd who leaves his flock of ninety-nine sheep on the hills to search for a lone lost one. A sensible shepherd would cut his loses, sacrifice one for the sake of the many. But not this one. He risks the whole herd, runs down the hills and rescues the one who wandered away.

In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. Matthew 18:14.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd could have stayed up in the safety of heaven. But instead, He took the daring risk of coming down to look for lost human beings – you and me. It was an extremely dangerous rescue effort. It even cost Him His life. But it had to be this way. God the Father wants you back in His family. When Jesus cleans out your heart, you start to see where He is working in this world, how He is still on a rescue mission to save the lost and how He wants you to join Him. You even see Him in the people you serve.

This is why we need pure hearted people who take a break from building their own legolands to serve others. We need people to serve homeless families this week as we host Family Promise. We need teachers and helpers for Discovery Kingdom, School of the Rock, Kids with a Mission, VBS (especially painters and decorators) and Special Way VBS. We need Growth Group leaders and Youth Group Leaders. We're looking for people to work with Habitat for Humanity and go on one of our Summer Mission Trips or the Creation Fest. Those with a pure heart can see Jesus in the ones they serve.

Tony Campolo tells a true story of a Jewish boy who suffered under the Nazis in World War II. He was living in a small Polish village when he and all the other Jews of the vicinity were rounded up by Nazi SS troops and sentenced to death. This boy joined his neighbors in digging a shallow ditch for their graves, then faced the firing squad with his parents. Sprayed with machine-gun fire, bodies fell into the ditch. His parents were also killed. But none of the bullets hit the little boy. He pretended to be dead and fell on top of them. Several hours later, when darkness fell, he clawed his way out of the grave. He made his way to the nearest house and begged for help. Recognizing him as one of the Jewish boys marked for death, he was turned away at house after house as people feared getting into trouble with the SS troops. Then something inside guided him to say something very strange for a Jewish boy. When the next family responded to his timid knocking in the still of the night, he cried, "Don't you recognize me? I am the Jesus you say you love." After a pause, the woman who stood in the doorway swept him into her arms and kissed him. From that day on, the family cared for him as one of their own."¹

"Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name," Jesus says, "welcomes me."

¹ Anthony Campolo, [Who Switched the Price Tags?](#)