

Faith Life Weekly –

*“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” - Matthew 18:6*

Ouch! Quite a warning, eh? We’ll be dealing with this text and the even more severe words that come after it in January, so I don’t want to spoil too much of it for you right now. Now, we can say that Jesus was being metaphorical or exaggerating a bit in his suggestion to snuff out those who place stumbling blocks before children in the faith. But I think the spirit of his message is something we should take very much to heart.

I think we can all agree that we want our children and our youth to grow in the faith and develop their gifts and talents to be disciples and servants for Christ. That’s not a very controversial thing to say. In that sense, none of us are putting up a stumbling block of any kind. Whew. But are we impeding them when we demand that their expression of faith be through the exact same rituals and practices that we might have had? Are we impeding them when we bid them come to worship, but then question their appearance or fashion sense when they do? Are we impeding them when we encourage them to express themselves, just so long as it’s not something that’s unfamiliar or ungratifying to us? And can we create a stumbling block by what we DON’T do? When we don’t express an interest or support for what’s important in their lives? When we tell them to take bible study seriously or “Sunday School” seriously or serving others seriously, but don’t do the same for ourselves?

It is a big goal of our church to support children and youth in their faith. But that’s not something that happens by just “budgeting” for it, or getting great staff or getting great programs. That’s a part, but it’s really just a starting point. It happens with relationships of respect and gratitude across generations. It happens with people setting aside expectations and assumptions to welcome something new. It happens with everyone claiming and thinking about the role and responsibility they have for our young families. This is how we clear some of those stumbling blocks in all of our hearts.

We are, all of us, somewhere in the middle between who we’ve been and who we’re called to be. We are all “on the way,” whether we’ve been on that way for 80 years or 80 minutes. Below is the words and, if I can get this to work, the link to a song by Casting Crowns about that truth.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DveYBno-pmQ>

P.B.