

Indispensable Wit(h)nesses

“You Need a Little One”

Acts 12:12-17

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Introduction

I love kaleidoscopes. You're looking through one eye fascinated by the ways in which the colors collide into one another, tumbling around as you spin the base. The small objects bump and roll into one another, but these insignificant little objects are reflected in the mirrors casting a spectrum of unforeseen possibility of colors, images, and shapes. It shows you things you cannot even imagine; yet there it is for you and you're helping create this new wonder.

An encounter with a kaleidoscope is what I think it means to be little. Just think about it. Looking through a tube with one eye squeezed tightly shut you experience an entire world looking through just that other eye. Through a tube of glass and mirrors a whole world of tiny objects, usually cast off beads, strings or pebbles opens up to you. This new world is created out of things only a child would treasure. It doesn't matter how old you are these toys of beauty and vision call us to see things differently. They remind us what it is like to view the world

as a series of beautiful collisions, and tumbling possibilities. The world of children, the ways of living little are seeing things for what they are; as well as for what they could be. So this morning we're going to slowly spin the kaleidoscope of childhood to see what revelations are reflected within our vision.

Posing the question

Rhoda's story calls us to see things just a little differently, too. Rhoda is a young servant girl in the house of Mary. On this evening followers of Peter gathered together to pray for his release. Their reaction to Rhoda's shouts of Peter's return makes me think however, they didn't really believe their prayers. As the adults were praying for a miracle to save Peter claiming that "crazy little Rhoda" was just seeing Peter's angel, Rhoda was trying to tell them that in fact their angel of prayer was standing right behind this very gate. Rhoda convinced these adults to break away from their prayer exercises to instead fully experience the endless possibilities of prayer. Rhoda didn't even see Peter, she only heard his voice and she believed! She looked through this kaleidoscope of troubles and saw the possibility of God. The kaleidoscope of Rhoda and these followers were filled with the small

realities. First, in their very recent past James had been captured by Herod and killed. Another piece of this vision was Peter locked in the bellies of the government's prison with no political or military intervention coming. Despite these seemingly defeating realities, Rhoda just threw them into her scope of vision, and through hers and God's turning, possibility happened. Through this newly discovered revelation Rhoda teaches us that we are to never forget to imagine and believe in God's possibility for us and our world. God's work will surprise us, if we only allow it to roll and tumble into things we cannot yet fully see.

Childhood is most certainly a glorious stage of being, but we don't get to be there for very long; nor should we. Our world and lives are full of possibilities and discoveries that reveal themselves in new ways throughout the many stages of our lives. The very same objects, themes, and places can peel back new layers of meaning at every new turn of our lives if we remember to hold onto those valuable lessons we so easily learned as children. I don't think Sweet is encouraging us to retreat back to childhood; instead I think we need to learn from the wisdom of children as they reveal the truth that possibility is still a reality. Children believe in fairytales and miracles not because they think

they're cold hard fact – looking for fact and method is the way adults see the world. They believe in these things because they see the truth of possibility lying behind the mystery.

Being a child is to see things as a rainbow of possibility. Seeing this beauty is the joy of being a child. Being an adult is to see the sections of color within those rainbows. Seeing the small pieces within this masterpiece is the joy of being an adult. But the possibility to view the world with faithful eyes does not just go from childhood to adulthood. Seeing the world through the kaleidoscope of faith is to see these fine details – yet still see God in the mix of it all. As adults we can so easily get bogged down with these details and then we only see a pebble, a string, or a coin. We don't have to live within this dualistic pattern of childhood or adulthood. We do have the ability to put these two together; yet it is difficult. I have to admit, I needed my four-year-old nephew's picture next to my computer as I wrote this sermon. I needed Ki's smiling face to be my little reminder of what it means to be little.

Truth A – Seeing Little

I needed Ki's face just as the people of Acts needed Rhoda. We all need to be reminded that what we think is impossible, can in fact be achieved. We need to be reminded that even if a problem seems a surmounting fortress of defeat, we don't need to know how to conquer it to first believe that we actually can. The plan, the process, the small details will come – but they'll only come if we actually believe this is possible.

We all see the little. Adults see little details, to-do lists and processes to achieve our final goal. Children see these things too, but they also see the possibility within them. Whereas adults see tasks or deterrents in the little, children can see God and hope in these same things. What I think differentiates these two perspectives of seeing little is how these little things can get cast into the broader picture. Children are capable of taking these little things transforming them into God's world of magic. Adults, using the same little things can see a world of problems and issues that seemingly have no beginning or end. When we look at the surmounting challenge of climate change, poverty, the economic crisis, racism, sexism ... the list goes on and on we and we get tired just making the list! We get overwhelmed. We defeat and discourage ourselves before we even take that first step.

We know that God calls us to these problems of our world, yet they seem so big. The small issues related to them can very easily become even bigger that we have no idea where to begin. This is exactly why we need a little one. When Rhoda joined that prayer circle she had no idea how these prayers might be answered, but she joined and genuinely prayed. This is just the model we need to follow as well. God does not call us to a task we cannot handle. God calls! Period! God call us to join this world of possibility and to do, to be, to live with one another. You may not fully know how your work is contributing to the larger picture, but as you're doing it genuinely and with God, trust that it is doing something. Your efforts, prayers, presence are all treasures in God's kaleidoscope of possibility no matter how insignificant you think they are. So take all those things you see that fill you with doubt, adding them the kaleidoscope we can begin to see how these too are treasures for God's possibility.

You may not know how to end poverty – I don't know this answer either; but if you ask any of our newly baptized Young Disciples they can tell you that one first step is simply asking that homeless person his or her name. This small act of looking him or her in the eye gives them the dignity of being seen. Asking them his or her name, gives them the gift

of being named. They may not be claimed by anyone now, but at one time, they were. They were valuable enough to be named, to be known, and so they are valuable enough now to share that name. No, this doesn't end poverty, and you may not be able to meet the immediate needs of that person; but in this small step you realize you can take another one. Even if you don't know what that next little step is, the tremendous amount of possibility found in that step is exciting and energizing enough for you to take it! If you don't believe me, believe our biblical story. We have the story of Rhoda and her contagious belief in God's possibility, but we also have another story.

Truth B – Little is our faith

Every year we ready ourselves for the birth of the Christ child. This birth story is so significant because it tells us that God is born to us in small ways not only every year, but also every day. We may not understand how to solve our problems, but trust that God comes to us in ways we *can* understand. Who would have guessed that this small infant would show us a whole new way of acting in our world? Through his continual compassionate actions, we learn how to listen to one another. Through his gentle touches we learn how healing can begin.

Who would have guessed that this small baby would show us another way of viewing our problems? The steps toward social wholeness don't come in military actions or brute strength. Instead, this wholeness comes through welcoming children, seeing and talking with the sick and rejected, and daring to say no to injustice. These small things are our clues to those larger than life imaginings that children can so easily grasp, and we adults are usually left grasping for understanding. Our faith is founded upon the little; yet when these little things are in communion with one another they cast an image of God's vision that far surpasses anything we can imagine. So while we do not fully understand, trust our little faith and work. With every little revelation of God or revolution of that kaleidoscope we see more and more of God's world reflected before us.

We need a little one to remind us to continue turning our world around so that we might keep discovering God. We need a little one to remind us to turn our world around because the way things are now, is not the way things should be. Having children around is sort of like watching a person view a kaleidoscope. It's partly just funny because they're so absorbed into this world of color and wonder that they stand there transfixed, and usually with their mouths gaping open in awe. You

know that look? It's the one where they're saying with their voice but also their bodies, awe, wow, oh! These noises make your mouth open, the sound floating on your breath because the experience that elicits this response is also opening your heart to beauty. It's an experience of opening beyond just our imagination and venturing into God's immense possibility and hope for our world. What you're absorbed into is your mind opening to imagination, splendor, wonder, and possibility. A person looking into a kaleidoscope is looking into a separate world, which is fully an atmosphere of awe, wow, and oh! But the joy is that with our continual efforts and God's encouragement we don't have to be separated from this world. So turn that dial, look through the world with childlike kaleidoscope eyes and at every stage of your life more and more of God's little beauty and truth is reflected before you. Wow!