

**Sermon: Be Seen Be Heard
Sunday, August 13, 2023**

**All Faiths Unitarian Congregation
By: Alberita Johnson**

Greetings today for International Children and Youth Day and just in time for the start of the school year we are reminded to send them off to school fully prepared and ready to learn.

Some of us might think that means dressing them up and sending them off to school where they sit in class soaking up what the teacher is sharing and doing their best to remember it. But there are also moments when our children and youth are inspired to raise an issue, it is at that time that they are not ready to sit and soak instead they need to Be Seen and Be Heard.

Be Seen Be Heard, ...I know it sounds familiar to most of us, but not exactly. There is something amiss, something different. Hmm, let me see, maybe it should sound more like Children should Be Seen, but Not Heard. Yes, that is it, an old proverb.

Proverbs, those pithy phrases of wisdom, that are often passed down from generation to generation. Sometimes they may lose their impact or meaning because, ...you see, time has a way of making us accept the inevitable and that is change. As a result what was once the norm is no longer appropriate.

We find proverbs in religious and spiritual texts, poetic forms, and philosophical writings and debates, we hear them inside and outside the home and they are often effective.

In fact, in the bible there is an entire book dedicated to Proverbs. Here is one of my favorites, **Proverbs 16:24**
it reads: “Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”

It is a nice way to show why it's important to choose kind and gracious words.

It is a strong verse that sounds weak but demonstrates the power of choosing words that give life.

But this strange idiom Children should Be Seen, But not Heard, stems back to the religious views of medieval culture and was meant to be taken literally. Back then they lived under strict religious rules and guidelines and many young people were silenced.

Children should be seen **and not heard** was so prevalent at one point people believed it was a biblical quote, but it is not.

In fact, I personally heard it repeated many times growing up. My parents said it too but were more direct. They simply said hold your tongue, which sounds like yet another proverb.

Speaking of the tongue...Mighty is the tongue, that small muscular organ. With it we bless and curse. Can't deny it. because...say it with me,...sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me, yes seems like it's just a cute children's rhyme. The problem is that it implies an untruth. Verbal abuse, and bullying in any way is immature, hurtful and can scar someone for years, even a lifetime.

Now what I learned regarding this particular proverb, **Children should be seen and not heard**, is that we have been quoting it incorrectly; in the original form, it was specifically young women who were expected to keep quiet. Meaning that young women should not speak in the presence of adults but it later evolved to include all children. Unfortunately there is little known as to why and when it evolved to include all children.

For just a minute I want to address the silencing of young women and then we will move on.

We have witnessed the effect that stifling a young woman's voice can cause. In Dame News, Fiona Landers a writer, actor, and singer says, quote: "Whether it's foretelling political doom or coming forward with sexual-assault allegations, women's voices fall on deaf ears."

Which begs one to question..., when will we ever learn that not listening to women has dire consequences for us all? This Not a rhetorical question.

Okay getting back:

Instead of silencing the voices of our children and youth here at All Faiths their Fall/Winter theme is Finding Your Voice. In other words our children and youth here are **Seen and Heard**.

Now I can see and I mean literally see that most of the folks before me this morning are from the **Children should be Seen and Not Heard generation**.

Even though it is not said aloud as it once was, all we need to do is look at the frowns when a child cries or children are noisy, notice the looks, rolled eyes, request to be seated somewhere else, why, because the young person has changed the atmosphere. And reaction to change is hard for us humans especially as we age, we do not want to be stagnant, but we are slow to... yes, change, slow to embrace new things.

Perhaps we have observed much, traveled the world, speak multiple languages, have a stellar education and holder of degrees, outstanding careers, raised a family and have settled in a way of doing and being that is no longer flexible.

In short we become inflexible and resistant to change with age in more ways than one.

To fight it is a losing battle, change is inevitable, we are born again each morning when we wake. And upon waking the next morning we are 24 hours older, everyday we grow older and hopefully wiser.

Nothing we can do about it we
 Except...Understand, everything changes because **time happens.**

And yes, change affects our proverbs and what was once a great truth, of powerful wisdom and reasoning, is no longer in fact it can be changed to its opposite. As it is today...our children and youth have something to say and we are listening.

Here is a quote from Waterford.org, a national education nonprofit dedicated to providing high-quality educational resources for children, families, and communities addressing the issue of silencing our youth,

quote

“When we think of modern-day heroes to teach about in class, it’s often people who made a difference when they were well into their adult years. But young people can—and often do—make a serious impact on the world. Teaching our children and youth about young heroes can remind them that they have the power to change the world, too, even one person or community at a time.” end Quote

Beloved, we hear voices of change, coming from the youth. **No longer are they being seen and not heard.** They have taken an old proverb that is no longer appropriate and found their voice. They have learned remaining silent is a form of oppression and no longer will they shut up and be shut out.

In fact today we will share with you a few modern heroes who have made a difference in their communities from a young age, some even reached the world.

Regina

1. Malala Yousafzai

As a child, Malala Yousafzai learned in her father’s school—one of the few in Pakistan that educated young girls. A girl attending school was considered a challenge to the Taliban regime’s authority, and defying them made her a target. She was shot on her way to school by a Taliban gunman but survived to become a passionate advocate for a woman’s right to education. July 12th is Malala Day in commemoration of when Malala spoke at the UN to present education as an international human right.

2. Greta Thunberg

19-year-old Greta Thunberg is an inspirational person for students who want to reduce the effects of climate change. When Greta began protesting the Swedish government's limited action against climate change at her school, she received worldwide attention for her desire to help save the planet in any way she could.

In 2019, Greta was named Person of the Year by Time Magazine in recognition of her work as a climate change activist. In an interview with the magazine, she discussed the importance of environmentalism, "We can't just continue living as if there was no tomorrow, because there is a tomorrow."

Her speech at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit, which you can access on YouTube, is a great way to show students that everyone—even young people—can do their part to take care of our planet.

3. Jaylen Arnold

Jaylen Arnold is another young person who has changed the world by advocating for bullying prevention. As a child, Jaylen was diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and Asperger's syndrome. Due to his differences, he was often bullied by other students at his school.

Jaylen decided that instead of fighting back, he could stand up for other children who are bullied because they are different. He started the Jaylen's Challenge Foundation, a nonprofit that educates children across the United States about how they can prevent bullying. In 2014, Jaylen was named a World of Children award honoree for his work as an anti-bullying advocate. To teach your students about Jaylen's mission, check out the videos and resources available on the Jaylen's Challenge Foundation website.

4. Marley Dias

At 11 years old, Marley Dias was frustrated that most children's books she saw were not culturally diverse. That's why she decided to launch the #1000BlackGirlBooks Twitter campaign to collect and donate books that would help Black girls feel seen.

Marley was able to donate more than 9,000 books through the program, and at the 2017 Forbes' Women Summit, she said of her experience, "I'm working to create a space where it feels easy to include and imagine Black girls and make Black girls like me the main characters of our lives."

To spread the word about Marley's vision for children's literature, you can read her book *Marley Dias Gets It Done: And So Can You!* as a class.

5. Nicholas Lowinger

As a teenager, Nicholas Lowinger started a community service drive to donate footwear to children experiencing homelessness. As part of the project, he started the nonprofit Gotta Have Sole.

To date, the program has donated over 100,000 shoes to shelters across every state in the United States. Your students can get involved by holding a shoe drive, starting an after-school club, or decorating a personalized card that the nonprofit can send out with a pair of shoes donated.

6. Sophie Cruz

When she was just five years old, Sophie Cruz gained national attention when she gave Pope Francis a letter asking him to advocate for undocumented immigrants like her parents living in the United States.

In her letter, she shared, "I have a right to live with my parents. I have a right to be happy... Immigrants just like my dad feed this country. They deserve to live with dignity. They deserve to live with respect. They deserve an immigration reform."

Since then, she has been a young advocate for immigration rights and has spoken at Supreme Court rulings, the Women's March, and other events across the country. To share with your class the fears that she and so many children of undocumented immigrants face, check out this speech she gave at the 2017 Women's March on Washington.

7. Jasilyn Charger

While growing up on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota, Jasilyn gained firsthand experience with the mental health struggles teenagers can face. She co-founded the One Mind Youth Movement to help youth who are a part of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe find support and resources when they're in crisis.

Additionally, Jasilyn co-founded the International Indigenous Youth Council. This organization, which has chapters across the United States, provides Indigenous youth with a space to stand together as leaders on issues in the country and in their communities. If any of your students come from an Indigenous background, consider connecting them with a local chapter if one is in your area.

You can also inform students about Jasilyn's work by sharing her speech "Protecting Mother Earth," which she gave at the 2018 Indigenous Environmental Network Conference.

8. Orion Jean

11-year-old Orion Jean founded the Race to Kindness foundation in 2020. That year, his organization held a Race to 100K Meals event that provided over 100,000 free meals for families across the country.

In 2021, Orion was named TIME's Kid of the Year for his life changing humanitarian work. He wrote his first book, A Kids Book About Leadership, to inspire kids to lead with kindness.

Right now, the organization is holding a Race to 500K Books, which hosts book donation drives and free children's book fairs where families can find and take home books. Your students can get involved by attending a Race to 500K Books Event if one is held in your area—including the Free Children's Book Fairs!

9. Param Jaggi

Param Jaggi is a young inventor who changed the world through his passion for environmentalism. When he was just 16 years old, he created the Algae Mobile—a device that can convert carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles into oxygen. He was recognized on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list for his contributions to creating clean, sustainable energy.

To inspire younger and older students alike, share his INKTalks speech: "At 19, I Think I Can Change the World."

10. Abigail Lupi

When 10-year-old Abigail Lupi visited her grandmother in a nursing home, she became aware of the silent struggle with loneliness many nursing home residents face. To support and comfort these residents, she founded the CareGirlz organization.

CareGirlz helps nursing home patients in New Jersey feel loved and less alone by matching them with young volunteers. "I like to brighten up people's days and help them have a fun time," Abigail said in an interview with The Inspire a Kid Podcast. "If I do my best, they'll have a smile on their faces by the end."

To share Abigail's mission, play her podcast interview or contact a local nursing home to see how your class can support their residents.

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Thank you Regina, Carlos ...our young heroes are not simply being heard but they are doing something...taking action.

In closing today, let us understand and accept that our children and youth are no longer voiceless, no longer silent and instead have proven to be

awake to the conditions of the current world we live in and how what we do today can and will affect the future of our world.

I believe our youth intend to change the trajectory for the better. Some might ask, can young people change the world? I say Absolutely they can.

Our youth across the world are leading with their heart in a holy place, a place of hope and love, **that includes Being Seen and Heard**, in politics, religion, activism, rights to education, bodily autonomy, social justice issues,... a seat at the table.

They are seeking to build a world where justice shall roll down like water and peace like an everflowing stream. They are leading with their heart in a holy place, a place of hope and love...as if their life depends on it, because let's face it...it does.

This morning to all the children and youth present and in cyberland I want. No I think we can agree... **We** want you to know, we see you, we hear you and we love and support you within and without these walls.

We commit to throw off the prison of silent oppression and joyfully join you and **Be Seen and Be Heard**. One voice alone is small, but together we make a mighty noise of good trouble. This is our commitment to you.

May our village of love expand and our children be blessed forever, Amen and Ashe