

There is no doubt that children watch a lot of television and other screen media. But what is it they are seeing? Violence. Two-thirds of all programming contains violence. An average American child will see 200,000 violent acts and 16,000 murders on TV by age 18. Programs designed for children more often contain violence than adult TV. Most violent acts go unpunished on TV and are often accompanied by humor. The consequences of human suffering and loss are rarely depicted. Children imitate the violence they see on television. Repeated exposure to TV violence make children less sensitive toward its effects on victims and the human suffering it causes. Kids who view violent acts on TV are more likely to show aggressive behavior, and to fear that the world is scary and that something bad will happen to them.

Children who consistently spend more than 4 hours per day watching TV are more likely to be overweight. The rate of obesity in our children is increasing. TV characters often depict risky behaviors, such as smoking and drinking, and also reinforce gender-role and racial stereotypes.

The average child is exposed to more than 40,000 TV commercials a year! In 2009, in the United States alone, companies spent over \$17 billion advertising to children—more than double what was spent in 1992. To young children, advertising is just as credible as is Dan Rather reading the evening news to an adult. It has created a phenomenon called “pester power.” Pester power refers to children’s ability to nag their parents into purchasing items they may not otherwise buy. Marketing to children is all about creating pester power, because advertisers know what a powerful force pester power can be. Dr. Brian Wilcox, professor emeritus in our own University of Nebraska,

said that parents “have to live with children making unreasonable purchasing requests from the advertisements they see--toys they want, food that is not good for them. This can be difficult for parents to manage.”

The point of my sermon is not to demonize television. I am not suggesting you get rid of all of your televisions. One couple did not have any television sets in their house. When they were to have a fifth or sixth child, their pastor suggested they get a television. Television programming can be beneficial. Children have learned their A, B, Cs on Sesame Street. Fred Rogers helped to calm the fears of children. Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian pastor and his ministry was that of children’s television programming, *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood*. The point I am wanting to make this morning is that our children are being negatively influenced by a powerful media. It is creating a serious challenge for parents and for the church. The Christian life is counter cultural. All of this media--television, video games, and the internet—makes it difficult to nurture our children with positive Christian values.

We find some very sage advice from two of our readings this morning. The Old Testament reading concerns Samuel while he was still a young boy. You may remember that Samuel’s mother, Hannah, was barren, so she bargained with God that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate him to a life of service to God in the temple. God gave her a son, Samuel. Samuel did serve in the temple. The passage ends, “Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people.”

Our gospel lesson is the only story we have about Jesus in his childhood. His parents were observant Jews who did all that the Torah required of them. He was

circumcised on the eighth day of his life. And then a little less than a month later they presented him to the Lord. In today's story Jesus returns to the temple for one of the three annual pilgrim festivals. The temple turns out to be the place where others see something in him that his parents do not. Later he will come back again and again as an adult, drawing both followers and critics with his teachings. For Luke, the temple really is Jesus' home—his Father's house—where he finds his purpose and the people who spot it in him. This story ends with “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”

Both of these stories are about young boys growing in favor with the Lord through life in a worshiping community! As one pastor writes, we do not come fully formed into the Christian life. Our life of faith begins at our baptism, but if we are to mature as faithful Christians, having the relationship and the ministry God intends for us, then we must grow beyond our baptism. It is within the worshiping community that we “grow in stature and in favor with the Lord,” as it was described for Samuel; and to increase in wisdom and in divine and human favor,” as it was described for Jesus. We grow in favor with the Lord through life in a worshipping community.

Both of these boys grew up in a worshiping community. They were a part of a living, worshiping community. Samuel had a guide and mentor in Eli, the priest, and he was surrounded by the company of God's people. Jesus was raised by observant Jews, who participated in the worship rites of the temple.

We are a worshiping community called to nurture our children. In our baptism rite, three parties make a vow. God promises to accept our child as one of God's. The parents make a vow. They are asked, “Relying on God's grace, do you promise to live

the Christian faith, and to teach that faith to your child?" And the church is asked, "Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture ... by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging *them* to know and follow Christ and to be faithful *members* of his church?" It takes a village to raise a child. For Christians, that village is the worshiping community.

In many churches, the children leave before the sermon to have their own children's church. I have been told that there is one church in Lincoln that does not allow children to be in worship. Wrong! Wrong! All wrong! Children need to be in worship. It is in worship they learn many things about their faith. When Gina was little, one day she recited the Lord's Prayer. We never taught that to her. She learned that in worship! It is a joy to see our children in church, and to see so many of you welcome them, chat with them, engage them. I also appreciate the ways we allow our children and youth to lead in worship. Samuel wore a linen ephod, a liturgical garment, which indicates that he had an official and particular role to play in the worship of God. Our children light the candles. The youth carry the "holy things" in our processional. They have been liturgists. We have had them lead various parts of worship, and perhaps we should allow them to do more. Like Samuel, our children can minister before the Lord.

When you think about how much time our children are spending in front of the media screens—television, video games, and the internet—and their powerful influence on our children, and compare that with just the few hours they participate in the worshiping community each week, we need to take this role seriously. I realize I am preaching to the choir this morning. Yet we all need to be reminded of our roles, and we

need to encourage parents to bring their children to participate in the worshipping community and to encourage our children.

Glory to God in the highest  
and peace to God's people on earth! **Amen.**