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**“Caring for All God’s Children”**  
Mark 9:33-37

Camilla is a twelve-year-old living in New York City. She has cystic fibrosis and requires ongoing medical care, including daily medications. Her mother works as an office manager and has health insurance through her employer but cannot afford to pay the premiums to cover her husband and two children. Camilla’s father works as a taxi driver. Their income is just above the eligibility for subsidized health insurance. Camilla sometimes goes without her medication and necessary medical treatment because her working family is unable to pay 31% of their income to buy medical insurance for her.

Deamonte was twelve years old when he died because he did not have health insurance to cover an \$80 tooth extraction. His story started when he complained of a toothache. His mother, who works at low-paying jobs, did not have employer covered health insurance and had been focused on finding a dentist who would accept Deamonte as an un-insured, but paying, patient. In the meantime, Deamonte’s mom took him to a hospital emergency room where he was given medicine for a headache, sinusitis and dental abscess and then sent home. His condition took a turn for the worse, and was back at the hospital, where he was rushed to surgery. The bacteria from his abscessed tooth had spread to his brain. The hospital bill was over \$250,000, but it was all too late. Deamonte died from the results of an unaddressed \$80 tooth abscess.

Another child, 14 years old, from Texas, died from kidney cancer after he was mistakenly denied health coverage.

Are you aware that 9 million children in the United States do not have health insurance coverage? And that the majority (almost 90%) of these children lives in working households? And that 90% of these children are American citizens?

How we treat our children says something about the kind of people we are – and about the kind of God we serve. After being contacted by the Children’s Defense Fund, I decided that I needed to speak out on this issue and to ask you to begin a prayerful discernment about whether or not it is time for you to take a stand. I believe that we need to be the arms of Jesus reaching out to gather every one of those 9 million children into our embrace.

We won’t all agree on what needs to be done about this anymore than we agree on everything else. But our ideas about how to handle this crisis should not paralyze us from doing *something*.

There are numerous scriptures about how we are to treat children. Read **Mark 9:33-37**. Along with this text, here are some others:

*“They do not plead the cause of the children who are fatherless, yet they prosper, and the right of the needy they do not defend. ‘Shall I not punish them for these things?’ says the Lord. ‘Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?’”* Jer. 5:29-29

*“Then the word of the Lord came saying, ‘Do not oppress the widow of the fatherless, the alien or the poor.’”* Zechariah 7:8-10

*“Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.”* Luke 6:20

*“You shall not pervert justice due to the children or orphans...” Deut. 24:17*

*“Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the children, and the widow.” Deut. 27:19*

*“The one who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but the one who honors God has mercy on the needy.” Prov. 14:31*

Here are some things to think about:

- Every day, 1,838 babies are born in the US without health insurance. That’s one child every 46 seconds. Judy is going to play “happy birthday” every time one of these children is born for the rest of the sermon. Let us take a moment to pray for that child when you hear the music.
- 48,000 children in Kansas are uninsured.
- It is a well documented fact that children who have health insurance have less serious illnesses and end up in hospital emergency rooms less often than those without coverage. Healthcare for children is not only the moral thing to do; it is the economically sound thing to do.
- The health care spending in the US is far more person than in other industrialized countries, yet we rank 24<sup>th</sup> out of 30 similar countries in infant mortality, and 22<sup>nd</sup> in low-birth weight.
- For what the US spends on 16 days of military spending in 2007, we could ensure all children comprehensive health coverage for a year.
- As children head back to school this year, too many do not have the health insurance they need to learn. Imagine not being able to see the chalkboard or read a textbook because your eyesight is bad and your family cannot afford glasses. Uninsured children are kept at a higher risk of not being able to live up to their full God-given potential.
- We are the wealthiest nation in the world and the only industrialized nation that does not take care of its children first. And it costs less to provide health insurance coverage to children than to any other group of people.

But there is hope! The Children’s Defense Fund is conducting a Healthy Child Campaign. It calls on Congress to:

1. Ensure that ALL children and pregnant women have health coverage and access to timely health care.
2. Guarantee ALL children and pregnant women comprehensive health benefits for all medically necessary services regardless of where they live.
3. Simplify and automate enrollment so it’s easy for ALL children to get and stay covered.

And there’s something you can do! Today in the foyer is a table set up with a petition sent out by our denomination asking for signatures. Take a second to sign your name. And there are postcards – three per person – to send to your senators and representative. Take a moment to sign the three postcards and leave them here. The Children’s Defense Fund is paying the postage and we’ll mail them. That’s all.

Of course, there's more you can do! You can pray. You can write a longer letter to your senators and representative. You can talk to others about this issue. I have additional information and resources for you, if you're interested – just ask! For \$25 to \$30 a month, individuals or groups can sponsor a child in need of help through a partnership between our denomination and the UCC.

The General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will have a resolution about this issue. Carmen and I will be voting. The resolution calls for our denomination to think Biblically and theologically about the issues of children's health care. It asks local congregations to be educated, and to advocate for immediate action to ensure health care for all children in the United States. You can tell us how you would like us to vote on this resolution.

Children need people to advocate for them. They do not choose their parents. They do not choose how or where to live. They are totally vulnerable and we must do all we can to protect them. Because the health insurance program we currently have is up for renewal this year, if we don't get the federal government to do something, it will likely be another seven years before health care for ALL children is addressed.

One last story: Cesar, a one-year-old from California, has asthma but no longer has health coverage. Although his father works, his parents cannot afford the Albuterol he needs to keep his asthma attacks from going to full-blown problems. Cesar's insurance was cancelled the first time when he was five months old because of a paperwork glitch. Eventually his insurance was reactivated, but denied again when he was nine months old because the paperwork was "inactive".