

## Soulcraft

Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Mark 12:28-34

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost, (Nov. 11) 2018

Baby Dedication of  
Magdalena and Paul Majs  
Kyle Childress

I want to begin this morning and again next Sunday by talking about hope. Is there hope? What does it look like? Where does it come from? And what do we do about it? It is also a question that has fear and despair hovering around it, for hope is not something that comes naturally to us. It is not easy to hope. Despair is easy. But hope has to be intentional and practiced. Hope is a biblical and theological practice of faith. Hope takes work. Hope takes training. Hope takes discipline. Hence, that's why we call it discipleship.

To have children and raise children takes hope. It always has though we might have taken it for granted in the past. But with the kind of world we live in today it is the existential question of our lives.

God's people have always had to practice hope. Every day we have had to get up and commit ourselves to hope: hope in God, hope in Christ. And contrary to what we might think, and what many of our neighboring churches think, hope in God is not about some sort of magical thinking that says God is going to reach down and make everything come out right – that's the thinking of pietism at its worst. Hope is also not that God is going to reach down and snatch us up to heaven – that's a kind of Gnosticism. And hope in God is not that we're going to take

control and make everything come out right – that’s the thinking of the Right Wing.

Biblical hope means that how things come out is in God’s hands but our calling is to intentionally live as God’s people who love God, and love our neighbors as ourselves, and that means our neighbors include all of creation.

As much as we might want a more dramatic or spectacular answer, our hope in Christ is bound up with our responsibility in learning to practice neighborly love with God and with one another and with all of creation.

This takes our whole life of walking with Jesus, and walking alongside others who are following Jesus, to know and to practice neighbor-love. And here’s the thing: all of this is done in community. We cannot do this on our own or simply when we feel like it. If there is one thing you’ve heard from me for twenty-nine years, it is that God’s plan, has always been and still is to call us to community. In Christ we are bound to each other. Our neighbors depend on us to show up and practice love and we count on our neighbors to do the same. Neighbor-love becomes the standard of how we think and live.

Let me give you an obscure biblical example. Over in Deuteronomy 22 there is a law that says, “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof; otherwise, you might have bloodguilt on your house, if anyone should fall from it” (Deut. 22: 8). In other words, the safety of your neighbor is part of the consideration when you build your house. You don’t want to build your house in a way that is life-threatening to your neighbor and if you do, then you want to eliminate that hazard.

We learn to think, pray, live, and do everything with the habit of neighbor-love within a community of neighbor-love, which is what the church is supposed to be. Furthermore, this neighbor-love, this sense of being connected to one another and to creation ripples out from us to wider and wider circles around us.

Loving God and loving our neighbors in community is not done on a whim or learned by watching a YouTube video. There is no app for it on our phones. It takes generations. It takes the long, slow conversion of morals, of practices, of habits one prayer, one hymn, one offer of hospitality at a time, the molding of one conviction at a time with one child at a time (see Larry Rasmussen, “Life Worthy of Life,” p. 67 in *Bonhoeffer and King*, ed. by Jenkins and McBride). It means teaching each other, together, how to garden and can. It means sharing childcare, sharing rides, sharing meals, sharing time.

The black church has long called this *soulcraft*. The white church generally knows very little about this. The white church, accustomed to being the majority, has tended to raise nice kids to be nice individuals in a nice society. The white assumption is that it is all about being an individual. The black church, Judaism, and others, has never assumed this. In order to survive, it is about being in community.

This is what the black church has called *soulcraft*. It is personal and communal; it is individual and collective – day after day, week after week, year after year, generation after generation. The soulcraft of loving God and neighbor in community creates and forms children, young people, and adults into a people who are resilient and tough, creative and imaginative, with the staying power of being

deeply rooted, and deeply connected and who are able to face adversity with tenacious hope and courageous love. It forms us into people who stick together no matter what. Who love each other no matter what. Who can count on one another no matter what.

Fifty-eight years ago this coming Wednesday (Nov. 14, 1960) six year-old Ruby Bridges integrated an all-white elementary school in New Orleans. She was by herself except surrounded by four United States Marshalls as they walked through hate-filled, screaming mobs of racist white people screaming threats toward Ruby. When recalling the first trip to her school, Ruby Bridges recalled, “I saw barricades and police officers and just people everywhere. And when I saw all of that, I immediately thought that it was Mardi Gras. I had no idea that they were here to keep me out of the school. ”

The other parents immediately removed their children from school so Ruby was the only student in her class. She didn't have anyone to play with or to talk to, or eat lunch with, except for her teacher, all day long.

And every day, those people who didn't like integration would go to Ruby's school, and they would yell horrible, mean things at her. Some called her names. One woman threatened to poison her. Others held up black baby dolls with nooses around their necks. Sometimes they would even throw rocks or eggs or tomatoes, trying to keep her away from the school.

Yet every day, Ruby Bridges would go to that school. She would get dressed and eat breakfast and get ready for school, and then her mother would say, “I'm proud of you,” and her father would say, “You're my brave little girl,” and they would all pray to God for help and guidance and then say, “I love you” to each other.

And every day, when Ruby prayed, she did not pray for herself. Ruby prayed for the angry people who yelled at her, asking God to forgive them and to change their minds. More than once, she would pause at the top of the steps of the school with the hate-filled crowds all around, and pray for them. When Ruby Bridges was surrounded by hate, she surrounded everyone with the love of God and neighbor.

We need to be raising a church full of Ruby Bridges. But it takes all of us. It takes showing up and taking time, day after day, one child at a time (or two). Raising children like Ruby is an act of hope.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.