

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

August 23, 2020, The 12th Sunday of Pentecost / The 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Psalm 138, (Call to Worship), Exodus, 1:8-20, Romans 12:1-5, Matthew 16:13-20

“IT’S WHO YOU KNOW”

Children’s Sermon

This morning I want to share a picture with you that I brought to church about 6 years ago, but some of you weren’t even born yet, and some of you were very young.

This picture was painted by a man named Norman Rockwell almost 60 years ago in 1961. Back then there was a magazine called the Saturday Evening Post and a lot of his paintings were on the cover of the magazine. But when he started working for the Post back in 1916 the editor told him that there was a rule at the paper. The only black and brown people that he could put in his paintings for the magazine had to be shown serving white people. By the early 60’s, even though things were slowly changing at the Post and this painting was allowed, he couldn’t live with that rule anymore and he left the Post to work for another magazine.

Norman Rockwell didn’t like that rule because that wasn’t what he believed and it wasn’t the world he chose to live in and that wasn’t what the Bible said. So he made this painting called the Golden Rule, and as you may or may not know that is a rule found in all major world religions and it’s in our Christian Bible in Matthew 7:12 where Jesus says: “Do to others what you would have them do to you.”

Norman Rockwell chose to live in a town and a neighborhood where he knew all kinds of people of different faiths and different colors and he put them in this picture: His friends, acquaintances and neighbors are all in this painting:

--David Gunn, Jr., the Black man in the upper right corner, was the son of one of Rockwell’s pipe smoking buddies.

--This Lebanese girl in the red shawl at the bottom center is Darlene Simon, niece to Michael Abdalla, who ran the grocery store a block from Norman Rockwell’s house.

--This boy behind Darlene is Paul Adams. Paul, along with his sister Pauline, portrayed at the bottom left, sang in a family gospel group (*based in their hometown of Cambridge, outside Saratoga. Grandma Moses, who was a resident of Cambridge and a close friend of Rockwell’s, introduced the family to the artist whose home and studio were only 15 minutes across the state border in Arlington, Vermont.*)

If you spend time looking at this painting, you’ll see Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. I like this picture because it reminds us that everyone is a child of God and that’s why I wanted to share it with you this morning. I hope you’ll go online and learn more about this painting and more about the people in the painting.

More importantly I hope you’ll keep your eyes open for the children of God who are in your life every day, because everyone you see is a child of God. And Jesus tells to treat them the way we want to be treated. That’s the Golden Rule Jesus gave us: Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<http://www.chronogram.com/hudsonvalley/on-the-cover-norman-rockwell/Content?oid=2134654>

See also, Norman Rockwell Museum, Blog Post, Feb. 5, 2014

“From photographs he’d taken on his 1955 round-the-world Pam Am trip, Rockwell referenced native costumes and accessories and how they were worn. He picked up a few costumes and devised some from ordinary objects in his studio, such as using a lampshade as a fez. Many of Rockwell’s models were local exchange students and visitors. In a 1961 interview, indicating the man wearing a wide brimmed hat in the upper right corner, Rockwell said, “He’s part Brazilian, part Hungarian, I think.

Then there is Choi, a Korean. He's a student at Ohio State University. Here is a Japanese student at Bennington College and here is a Jewish student. He was taking summer school courses at the Indian Hill Museum School." Pointing to the rabbi, he continued, "He's the retired postmaster of Stockbridge. He made a pretty good rabbi, in real life, a devout Catholic. I got all my Middle East faces from Abdalla who runs the Elm Street market, just one block from my house. Some of the models used were also from Rockwell's earlier illustration, United Nations."

http://www.nrm.org/2014/02/golden_rule/

(Italicized sections not used this time)

Introduction to Exodus

This morning's reading from Exodus comes between two important time periods in Israel's life. The stories of Joseph have come to an end. The stories of Moses are beginning. The verses we read this morning stand between those two stories. Joseph is the one whose father made him the coat of many colors, whose jealous brothers sold him into slavery, and he rose to power in Egypt. When famine came to the land Joseph was reunited with his father and eleven brothers and they moved their families to Egypt to join him. This was how the Israelites ended up in Egypt.

For many generations they lived with the Egyptians, Joseph and his descendants overseeing the crops of Egypt, but then times changed. The passage this morning takes place just before the stories of Moses, the baby found in the bulrushes who led the Israelites to the Promised Land.

"Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." (Exodus 1:8).

This one short sentence holds hundreds of years of history:

years when neighbors became strangers,
 years when trusted allies became enemies,
 years when power structures changed,
 years when those without power became slaves
 years when those with power wanted more power.

And in those years the trusted descendants of Joseph, who had once advised the Pharaoh, became the slaves of the current Pharaoh in Egypt. That Pharaoh and his followers no longer knew the Israelites as allies, neighbors and friends,

they now perceived that growing population as enemies to be subdued and enslaved.

"It's who you know," and the Pharaoh no longer really knew the Israelites.

This week, as we enter our 23rd week of being apart from each other because of the world Pandemic, and as the political and racial divisions within our nation continue to be heightened with every news cycle, that sentence jumped out at me: "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."

"It's who you know," and that ancient sentence from Exodus that holds centuries of Israel's history, holds truth for us this morning:

"It's who you know," and when we don't make time to know each other, it is easy to become enemies.

When we don't make time to know each other, it is easy to fit each other into categories, whether those descriptions are true or not.

"It's who you know," and when we know issues, but not the people the issues are about,

our world becomes a dangerous place for those with power and those without power.

We're inundated with the truth of our divisions any time we turn on the news, or pick up a paper, or open our computers or check social media. We live in a world divided, and who we know shapes how we understand that world: in the Middle East, in Africa, in Asian, in Mexican and American border towns, in our neighborhoods in the Quad Cities, in our families, and in our schools.

We live in a world divided where we don't make time to know each other.

"It's who you know," and we are divided by race, by money, by power;

we're divided by which television or radio station, or online news service delivers our news;

we're divided by which political party shapes our understanding of America.

"It's who you know," and we live in a world that calls us to take sides in so many different ways.

And in the midst of all that division,

In the midst of knowing issues and not people,

In the midst of a culture that values winning over reconciliation,

And confrontation over collaboration and conversation,

It's easy to feel overwhelmed;

it's easy to feel helpless,

It's easy to feel angry and frustrated;

it's easy to feel confused.

And truth be told isn't it just easier to choose a side and stay there, surrounding ourselves with people who think like us, and believe like us and if we're honest, look like us?

"It's who you know." And into the mix of all of this division Jesus stands before each one of us this morning and asks the same question he asked Peter long ago: "But who do you say that I am?"

I think this question is where the work of faith becomes a reality. Because how we answer this question about who Jesus is, will shape how we live in this divided world.

If we agree with Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, then what does it mean for the way we live and speak and make choices this week in our divided world?

If Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God,

If Jesus is Who we know,

then how are we going to live this coming week in this divided world

with our friends and our enemies

and with those who are different from us,

and with those who don't look like us,

and with those who watch that *other* news channel,

and with those who believe truths diametrically opposed to our truths.

If Jesus is Who we know,

then how are we going to live this coming week in this divided world

with those who hear the names of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the words: "Black Lives Matter," differently than we hear them?

How are we going to live in this divided world, with or without our masks on?

If Jesus is Who we know,

then how are we going to live this coming week in this divided world

with that family member,

or that neighbor

or that person in the desk 6 feet away from ours,

or that next person who makes these difficult days more difficult?

If Jesus is Who we know,
 then how are we going to live this coming week in this divided world?:
 what are we going to say,
 what are we going to think,
 what are we going to do,
 how are we going to live our faith?

And what do Paul's words to the Romans mean for us this morning? What do they mean for us as we go from this time of worship into our week? Listen to them again, this time in the Message Translation:

“So here's what I want you do, God helping you:
 Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—
 and place it before God as an offering.
 Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God.
 Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.
 Instead, fix your attention on God.
 You'll be changed from the inside out.
 Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it.
 Unlike the culture around you,
 always dragging you down to its level of immaturity,
 God brings the best out of you,
 develops well-formed maturity in you.” (Romans 12:1-4, The Message)

“It's who you know.” So, what are you going to do about it?

We belong to each other, in the great diversity of God's good creation.
 As Mother Teresa used to say: “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

May we be like Shiphrah and Puah, those wily Israelite midwives, who long ago said “no” to the powers that seek to divide and destroy us.

May we be like Norman Rockwell, who pushed the editors of the Saturday Evening Post who had told him that the only people of color on the covers he painted had to be portrayed as servants, when what he wanted to do was show his friends and neighbors and their children in the many colors of God's creativity,
 and then challenge us to choose to care for each other with the Golden Rule.

May we be like Jesus who came to unite us, by naming us all as sons and daughters of God, living and dying and raising from death, to unite us with God, and unite us with each other; ALL of us with each other.

And may the grace, and power and Love of Christ
 guide our steps,
 and shape our lives
 and give us the courage
 to be transformed by God's Love

and not conformed to a divided world,
as we follow Jesus' "Golden Rule":
" Do to others as you would have them do to you."