

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

September 23, 2018, The 18th Sunday After Pentecost/The 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Psalm 1, Mark 9:30-37

FEEDING OUR ROOTS

This week I heard a story that broke my heart. It came from someone that attended last Monday's Women's Interfaith Dialogue at the mosque over in Davenport. These wonderful gatherings of women from Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious communities in the Quad Cities have been happening for 13 years. Part of the evening is talking with the women at your table from the various communities.

This year's theme is "Fear and Faith--The Impact of Fear on the Faithful." The second gathering will happen a week from Monday on October 1st, and you can read about it in your bulletins. During the evening this week one of the women who is a substitute teacher for first and second graders here in the Quad Cities told the table about her experiences. She is a Muslim woman who immigrated to the United States from Pakistan nine years ago. She wears a hijab, the head covering that some Muslim women wear. She told her table that more than once she has had six and seven year olds tell her: "You don't belong here in America; you are different. Your skin is a different color, go back to where you came from."

This story breaks my heart, not only because of the way this woman has been treated, but equally because the ones speaking those words to her were so very young, already indoctrinated in the sin of racism.

This story is such a powerful reminder that children listen to us.

They watch us.

They learn from us when we are teaching them,

and maybe more often when we aren't even aware they are listening.

Before children can make up their own minds about what they believe, they are learning and copying what we believe.

Even very young children can tell you what their parents believe and what they think is important.

They can also tell you what is important to their teachers, and to the people they sit with Sunday by Sunday in church.

Our children and youth are watching and listening to us, and learning from us, all the time!

And as many parents can tell you, they can often repeat word for word, the very thing you'd never want them to say in public.

But they've learned it from you.

What we say to our children and youth, whether we say it directly to them, or they overhear us talking at home, in our neighborhoods, and here at church, shapes the lives of our children.

This morning's Psalm calls us to pay attention to what is watering our lives, what is feeding our roots as people of faith.

And I believe it also calls us to pay careful attention to how we are nourishing and nurturing the lives of the children and youth in our families,

and the children and youth here in our Family of Faith at church.

On Bible Sunday when we give our children and youth Bibles, we are saying that it is important to us what stories are shaping the lives.

Psalms 1 says that people who spend time thinking about God's teachings, are like trees planted by streams of water.

There are so many water sources in our children's lives. So many different voices and experiences are feeding their roots, their lives, their beliefs, and the way they see the world.

On Bible Sunday we are saying that one of the best gifts we can give our children is their story of faith.

It is so important to us that they know the love of God for them, from the time they are not even old enough yet to hold their first Bible.

This morning we have given the children of our church their family story. It is a story of life and faith, and the love of God, that has been handed down for centuries, entrusted to us, so that we will pass it on to the next generation.

We give Bibles to our children from the time they are infants because we don't want the day to come when someone stumbles across a Bible and no one knows what it is or what it is for.

We want our children to meet their family when they are young.

That way Moses and Miriam, Abraham and Sarah,

Esther, Daniel, David, and Ruth

Mary and Joseph and Jesus won't be strangers,

but people whose stories affect their lives,

just as our lives have been affected.

We want each of our children to know that these Bible stories are for them from a very early age. They each get their own copy of the Bible, instead of families getting one to be shared by the children, so that they know that these are their own stories, with their own name written on the inside, as well as the name of their church family.

These Bibles are purchased with Memorial monies given in remembrance of saints of this church family who have gone home to heaven. Past generations of this church continue to nurture the faith of the current generations of this church.

At birth, and then when they are four, our children get Bible stories with lots of pictures and a few words; first words geared for toddlers, and then words geared for beginning readers, so the day will come when they can read the stories for themselves.

For our 2nd graders we've given them the Contemporary English Version.

How many of you remember the Good News Bible, or when it first came out The Good News for Modern Man? (show of hands) The American Bible Society created that translation in the 1960's and 70's for people for whom English was not their first language.

The Contemporary English Version was created in the 1990's with a similar intention, to be a translation used by those who are learning English, and to be an easily understood by grade-school aged readers.

It is one of the translations I use for my personal reading at home. I really like the way it helps me think about Bible stories and ideas about faith. I highly recommend it if you adults are looking for a new Bible to read at home.

When our children reach 6th grade, and are getting closer to Confirmation age, they receive the New Revised Standard Version that we have in our pews, and that you hear from the pulpit most Sundays. It is the translation they use when they move from the Younger Sunday Class to the Youth Class, and during Confirmation.

In your bulletins this morning there is a blue insert that I showed to the children earlier. It is a guide for our families of 2nd graders and older who are wondering which Bible stories to read with their children. It's a list for our 6th graders and older to explore on their own.

It is also a great way for the rest of us to review some of the main themes and stories of the Bible. This list was created by another pastor as a list of what she wished kids knew before they came to Confirmation. You'll see as you read through it that some of it is about the Bible, and some is about the life of faith.

I haven't given you adults this list for you to feel tested by it. If you've already started to read through it and you are thinking, "oh my gosh, I don't know very much on this list," please stop.

My hope is that this list can be a tool to guide you in your own reading and exploring the Bible. Or it can be a guide for revisiting favorite stories and passages.

At the top of the first column I've listed where you can find more information, and you can ask me any time and I'll help you explore this list.

This list holds some of our stories of faith, and that's why I share it with you. It's a tool for exploring.

Now, while this is a day about the stories of faith for our children, I do want to speak to you adults for a moment about the Bibles you read. If you are of a certain age, you began by reading the King James Version of the Bible. Admittedly the language is beautiful, but also admittedly it is difficult to understand as it was a translation done in the 17th century.

If you are still reading the King James Version I encourage you to get a second Bible to read. The Contemporary English Version the children get is wonderful. I also highly recommend The Message translation as a much more modern translation, or the New International Version. The New Revised Standard we have in the pews is also a great translation.

Psalms 1 calls to us this morning, asking, "What is watering your roots?"

If you can't understand the language you are trying to get nourishment from, it's time to change the language.

If I can help you with this, or you'd like to take a look at these different translations, please stop by my office.

Now, if you are thinking that this sermon about caring for our children is only for parents and grandparents and Sunday School teachers, I want to remind you that all of us here in this Sanctuary are caregivers for the children and youth of our church.

Each time one of our children is baptized you are asked this question:

"Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ,
 Promise to guide and nurture this child
 by word and deed, with love and prayer,
 telling them the Good News of the Gospel,
 encouraging them to know and follow Christ
 and to be a faithful member of his church?"

I have never heard any of you say no!

It is an honor and a privilege on those baptism Sundays to say that we will “guide and nurture, by word and deed, with love and prayer,” the children held in their parent’s arms, or standing beside their parents.

But I pray these are more than just words for a special day, but a promise for life to each of the children of our church.

We are the ones God has placed in their lives to say to them: “This is way to the water of life. This is the Good News of the Gospel,
Join us in knowing and following Christ.”

So many voices call to the children and youth of our family and our Church Family. They need you to tell them the best story there is,
in their families,
in their Sunday School rooms,
in the Youth Room,
when they sit beside you in church,
when they bump into you in the hall,
and when you sit beside them at the sacred Doughnut Hour after church.

What do our children of the church hear you saying to each other and to them?
Adults, I challenge you to talk to at least one of our children or youth every Sunday, starting today!

What do our children see you doing in the life of faith? Is faith an hour on Sunday or a lifestyle they can watch you live?

What messages of love do they hear from you, and what messages of judgment?

What do they learn from you here at church in the way you treat your friends, your acquaintances, the people who get on your nerves, and the people you avoid?

What do they overhear you saying?

Our children and youth are watching us to see if the Good News of the Gospel means something to us.

They are watching us to see how we know and follow Christ.

They are watching us to see if loving Jesus makes a difference.

We have a precious gift to give to our children and youth.

It is the gift of life.

It is the Good News story that our God who created the Universe,
who flung the stars into the night sky and gave them each a name,
loves each one of us so much that God sent his only Son to earth,
to show us the face of love.

Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

The empty cross and the empty tomb promise us that Jesus love is stronger than death, stronger than the hate, stronger than anything that can divide and separate us from our God.

We have a precious life-giving gift to give to our children and youth.

It is the gift of love that each of us has been given in Jesus.

What will **you** tell and show the children?

They are watching and listening and learning and following.
Amen.