

Sunday, May 9, 2021 Psalm 145, 2 Timothy 1:3-7 , John 15:9-17

I Love You- Love Others

This is Christian Family Sunday- when we celebrate the joy, wonder, thanksgiving and challenges of being brothers and sisters within the Christian church as Jesus calls us to love. When we think of families we often remember traditions passed down from one generation to another usually around specific occasions like Christmas or Easter or even a family birthday. In these pandemic days many of these family traditions have had to be changed, modified or even lost. But one tradition that I am aware of occurred each Easter as food was being prepared for cooking. The grandmother was readying the ham for baking and without comment quickly cut off each end of the piece of meat. Then she put it in the roast pan and put the lid on and put it in the oven. It was a glorious meal shared by everyone. Years passed and the tradition of a baked ham was part of many family gatherings. Each person preparing the dish the same way.

Eventually the it was the daughter's turn to make the ham. And she proceeded to cut the ends off of the ham and placed it in the roast pan. All was good and tasty. The ham tradition continued. More years passed and it became the granddaughter's turn to bake the ham. She too saw how it had been prepared and proceeded to cut the ends of the meat off and placed it in the roasting pan. However, the grandmother watched the young woman prepare the meat and simply asked her granddaughter, "What are you cutting the ends off for?" the granddaughter quickly responded, "That's how you showed us Grandma. The woman's mother also agreed. I did what you always did, too. The Grandmother now in hysterics laughed, out loud. I had to cut the ends off of the ham not because it would make any difference in the flavour or taste of the meat. It was simply so that the ham would fit into the roast pan!

Traditions= are passed on from one generation to another. No doubt you can probably think of things your grandparents or parents did with you and now you have shared them with your children or even your grandchildren. Whether it is how to make a special dish or dessert; or whether it is in the way you taught your child to catch a ball or even knit or sew. But what about sharing your faith from one generation to the next? This is what makes family traditions shine bright as we honour the family of Christ gathered as one.

Our world is in need of healing not only from the covid19 virus which continues to spread amongst the people around the world. We are in need of healing because of mental health issues involving panic, uncertain of life focus, and especially spiritually because many people have forgotten or did not know God is able to help us in our every day living. I've heard people say," God is not there for me- that's not my church, that's my Grandparents church- faith is not important today. I know what life is all about and I can handle it alone.

Yet, when a child asks the question while staring up at the stars, 'Who made all this?' and the parent cannot answer, even a little bit-there is a faith gap. There is a need for transformational faith from generation to another. Yet in 2021 we cannot take this for granted because right now it is rare that generations are connecting in any way.

But we must reflect on our reading from Psalm 145 states, "One generation shall praise your works to another, and declare your marvellous deeds." Let me ask this question, have you spoken to your family about God's creation lately? How amazing it is from the miracle of a seed producing everything from a small flower to fruit to a tree? Or the wonder of space where many astronauts whose life is science focused come back to earth as strong believers in a Creator God. In the current generation, are we failing to do what the Psalmist took for granted?

Each generation has memories, stores and values it wants to pass along to the next generation and this includes spiritual values of our faith. There are however some myths about this. One such myth is that children will catch our spiritual values by simply being around the parents and the church. Values are more caught than taught but we must be intentional about teaching why the value is important. They might also catch the wrong values if in our weakness we display the wrong things.

Another myth is that church is the place where passing on faith to the next generation takes place. Just like schools are to teach the basics of reading and writing, the church is to teach about Jesus. This is tricky today because we are now experiencing lost generations with people who were not raised in a church coming to Christ which is absolutely wonderful but are unsure of what to do to teach their children. But what the reality about this is that parents are much more in a child's life than any church leader can hope to be.

A third myth is that it is not worth the effort. Often we hear of teenagers pushing back or rebelling against parents and their ideas but if parents do not teach strong values, young adults will struggle to make wise decisions according to Christ's teachings. To watch a child worship and pray is a joyful experience but when they grow older and choose to worship because of God's Spirit in their life, there is hope for the world.

Each generation must be taught who God is, and what God has done for all humanity. Today we may wonder where God is in the midst of the many dying of covid19 around the world, or when a tragic accident or natural disaster takes place. But with God those who have faith are able to cope better because they rely on God's Spirit for support and guidance.

Paul was an avid missionary and when he visited Lystra he met Timothy. We don't know the whole story about Timothy's background but it may be the Timothy's family became Christians during that first visit. During the next 5 years, Timothy matured in his faith under the spiritual guidance of his mother and grandmother. Paul writing in his Second letter to Timothy states, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now I am sure lives in you." What had Paul noticed about Timothy in those intervening years? What had Lois and Eunice taught this young person and how did faith transfer from one generation to the next?

We know that children mimic their parents' actions and experiences. For example if a parent does not like barbecue chips, the child will not be exposed to them and probably not like them. But if the child is told that liver and onions tastes great and the parent likes this dish,

they will most likely try it at least, and may be even like it. This is also true of religious experiences. Children will know it is a good thing to pray if taught at an early age to do so each day. They will be comfortable doing so in a congregational setting with everyone praying in a church setting or even virtually as we are doing today. Listening to stories of Jesus and his love for all ages will certainly invite questions but as they seek answers they will come to experience God's Spirit and come to understand what Jesus meant as he talked. Ultimately they will realize why Jesus died for us and what His resurrection means as we live.

As Christians we mature in faith at different rates- some people read the Bible as a guidebook for every day. Others only when crises or celebrations occur; but no matter what leads us to read about God Jesus and the Spirit, we will grow in faith. What is important is that we all grow in understanding of what it means to be Christian and particularly what being called to serve Christ is about. Paul also states, that God has not given us a spirit of fear nor should we be afraid. But God has given us power to love and to do so because we have minds to think and choices to act. This is what being a Christian means- serving while loving God, giving of oneself without counting the cost.

When parents decide that the church's values are deemed valuable to their family, it is important that commitments are made. In our Christian tradition as the UCC, we welcome into God's Family adults, infants and children through the sacrament of baptism. The water symbolizes the new life individuals receive as all begin their journey with Jesus. This passing on of faith is then made public and celebrated as all come to know Jesus not only as the One who died for them and rose to new life, but as the focus of our faith, the Son of God. And once the church welcomes you into God's family- you are never the same again! God's Spirit acts through those who have served throughout their lives and encourages others to grow.

On this Christian Family Sunday, we are reminded of Christ's statement in John 15. I have loved you, so abide in my love. Jesus' commandment is to love one another as he loves. No one has greater love than this- to lay down one's life for his friends. Jesus chooses us and he calls us to go and bear lasting fruit. The fruit of His Spirit which enables others to know we belong to him. Jesus also calls us to grow in faith and to do this means to pray for others and for ourselves so that we might grow in our understanding of Christ's teachings and to put our faith into action.

This faith in action means praying for others. As sisters and brothers in this Christian family we call the church we are called to pray but we are to pray for more than just blessings and protection. We are to pray for those in our Christian family to grow in wisdom as they apply Christ's teachings to difficult experiences as they make life choices. We are also to pray for others to experience the fullness of Christ and how his death and resurrection can make a difference in our life on earth as we consider our eternal life with Him. It also means praying for the relationships and friendships we enter to be healthy and positive both now and as family members grow older. We need to consider praying for future relationships and generations. Jesus also calls us to pray for ourselves as we seek wisdom in to what to say and when to say it.

As a Christian family known as the church, we are called to share our hopes and fears, our challenges and celebrations and our faith and uncertainties. And we must do this with each generation because if we do not teach our children about Jesus, who will? We are the body of Christ and we are a community of faith who celebrates God's indwelling presence.

Let us rejoice together on this Christian Family Sunday knowing that through faith we are one with Christ and one with each other because Jesus states "I love you- love each other". Let us follow Christ's command and love.

PRAYER

God we thank you for our church family and we pray for each person who believes and calls themselves Christian. We ask for your blessing upon us and as we remember traditions and challenges, we ask that you would grant us wisdom and courage to discern the truth that is needed. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.