

Living on the Edge

Psalm 96:1-6; John 15:1-12

Whitefish UMC

VBS Sunday, June 28, 2009

- † Living on the edge sounds like risky business, doesn't it? For most of us adults, it's not a good thing. But apparently for children, most at least, it's great. That's what the developers of our Vacation Bible School curriculum thought, anyway.
- † All week long we listened to this manic woman named Xtreme Jean tell us about scary, edgy sports that we could do at Camp E. D. G. E. Anybody remember what that stands for? (Exploring and Discovering God Everywhere, in case you missed it.)
- † I have a confession to make. All this edgy stuff gave me a headache. Even some of the children could be seen covering their ears at times and hiding behind their youth helpers. Apparently I scared Sylvia a lot when I played the part of the storm that tossed Jonah's boat on his way to Ninevah. So I did my part to add to the frenzy.
- † Wouldn't most of us rather live somewhere in the comfortable middle? It's so much safer there, and calmer, and we have enough storms and dangers, thank-you-very-much.
- † A friend sent me a column from the Denver Post written by Tina Griego reflecting on her mother, herself as both daughter and mother, and her son. We've just celebrated Father's Day, and Mother's Day a month ago, and since this last week has been all about raising up our children in this wonderful family of God, I share it with you.

- † *My son is in the back seat, behind me where I can't see his face unless I tilt sideways to peer into the rear-view mirror. He's in first grade. "I made you something for Mother's Day at school, but I'm not going to tell you what it is*
- † *'cause it's a surprise." I like surprises, I say. Well, try and guess what it is, he says. I thought it was a surprise, I say. Guess, he says. "A flower? No. A card? No? Pottery? You're cold." A pumpkin. No, well you're kinda warm. A plant? I'll give you another clue. It's made of paper." A picture? No. A flower. You already said flower. And besides a flower is not made out of paper. It could be, I say. He sighs. I will give you another clue, OK? It has numbers. Numbers and paper. A bingo card. Wrong! I don't know then, I say. I'm going to tell you, he says, but then you have to forget. OK? You're not supposed to tell, I say. "It's a calendar, numbers, paper, get it, a calendar."*
- † Ms. Griego goes on to talk about how she has her own calendar regarding her mother, her mother who died of cancer at the age of 45. Ms. Griego was 25 years old at the time of her mother's death. And thus began her calendar, a countdown each year as she approached the age of her mother at the time of death.
- † *This will sound morbid to some of you. I can assure you we [her sisters and her] do not walk around sighing or fretting or imagining our own eventual demise. The calendar, in fact, prevents this. It has been not simply a measurement of time, but a calling to account of the way in which that time has been spent. It provides a place from which to take stock.*
- † *Twenty years becomes 10 and then five and then one and so, last month, I turned*

45 and outlived my mother. The calendar's last page turned...I move into years that my mother did not have, and, if anything, I feel the presence of that time, the gift of it. Which is just another way of saying the questions I asked myself while I marked the calendar within me haven't changed.

- † *What are you doing with the time you have been given? What is important to you, and are you doing that? What matters? We begin to be parents as children, to be mothers as daughters. We learn what to do and, in some cases, what never to do.*
- † *Ms. Griego closes with these words: I look back now as the mother of two young children. Conscious of time in a different, though no less poignant way. No less precious. The daughter I was all those years ago is the mother I am still becoming.*
- † *My son says from the back seat: "OK, now you have to forget it's a calendar. Think of sheep." Sheep? "Yeah, you know count sheep. OK Mom? What? Did you forget it yet? Ba-a-a, Mom? What? I can fake-burp my ABC's. Watch."*
- † *It would be tempting to say that about sums up a week of VBS. Incredibly profound moments of grace, mystery, and wonder all mixed up with animal sounds, fake burps, and wacky silliness.*
- † *You can't predict or manage any of it. Sometimes what ought to be the best times turn into disaster. The tent falls down, someone gets hurt, an adult loses patience, one kid clocks another.*
- † *But then the most unlikely child looks up in wonder and gets it. Gets that God really does love him and that love is made real in Safeway's 99 cent a loaf sliced wheat bread.*

- † The scripture readings this morning confirm that what is required, in the chaotic times as well as the blessed times, is to remain faithful—no matter what. Only then can we become part of God’s divine creativity.
- † “Honor and majesty are before the Lord; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.” When we develop a faithful relationship with God and keep our focus there, we find strength and we see beauty.
- † The reading from John’s Gospel, the scripture that formed, in part, our fourth day at VBS, draws upon the metaphor of the vine, the vine grower, and the fruit. The fruit comes from the vine. The vine is nurtured by the vine grower. All are in relationship with each other.
- † And that relationship boils down to love—Jesus’ intimate relationship with God as father, as parent. The love that God extends to Jesus, Jesus gives to us, if we but embrace his most important commandment, the only one, really, that he gave—
- † Love one another as he modeled that love from God to us. Sounds simple, but as any person who has tried to love as Jesus loves knows, it’s is anything but easy or simple.
- † In many ways, VBS is a microcosm of our larger life. As pastor to many of the children and adults who participated, I know that their lives are full of challenge, brokenness, and grief. For some it was difficult to come to the church each day without remembering someone who was so loved but is no longer here.
- † For others, illness, broken relationships, and an uncertain future shadowed the silliness and liveliness of each day. For some of us, our relationships at home showed the strains of not measuring up to the biblical ideal.

- † How then, was it, is it possible to love as Jesus loves? Building on our scripture texts from last week, it requires that moment of stillness, that reminder from Jesus—“Peace, be still.”
- † Yes, he was talking to the stormy seas but he is still talking to us. For the fruit of abiding in love is not based on perfect outcomes. It’s based on doing the best we can, after calling upon God in prayer.
- † Any parent or lover of children knows the wisdom of this. We cannot live their lives. We try to guide them. Some days we are the wise ones, and some days they put us to shame in their perceptiveness.
- † Above all, we let our children know that they are loved. But we also know that they are living on the edge, and it’s risky business. They may live into consequences that break our hearts. And there are no guarantees as to perfect outcomes.
- † But there is one guarantee—that if we love them, then they will know that they are loved and maybe, by the grace of God, they will know something of the love of God through Christ. The rest we leave in God’s hands.
- † We, all of us in this church, are parents in one way to the children who have filled this special place this week. It’s not a one-time event, though. Parenting isn’t just about the high moments, the grace-glimpses.
- † My friend sent me another beautiful reminder by John O’Donohue: *To be a parent is to be invited into the natural depths of divine creativity. Mothers and fathers inhabit the secret of God’s heart. They open a sacred door in the soul for a most vulnerable and intimate stranger to enter and inherit the earth.*
- † *Though the child comes to be through the gradual rhythm of nature in that warm space between two lovers, the creation of a child is an event that takes place on the cliff-edge of Nothingness ... There it is again—that edge thing!!!*

- † *Being a parent is also the unromantic endurance of watching over, providing, and caring for your child...Being a loving parent is work that guarantees the transformation of the parent's ego, for in the work of rearing children, the limits of your selfishness, needs, and smallness, are continually challenged.*
- † *Somehow you find within your heart a love that is willing to stretch further and further. In this sense, the work of parenting is profoundly blessed work. Some people pray in words; in the work of raising children, parents pray every day with every fiber of their being.*
- † *The world of your child takes up the horizon of your heart. When you bring a child into the world, you become vulnerable in a new way....*
- † *But even the most caring parents will leave inevitable trails of damage. This is a natural part of the 'dark industry' of imperfection and brokenness that lies within each one of us...Although often arduous and painful, ultimately parenting is tender, vulnerable work, a work of fragile yet wondrous beauty.*
- † Parents in the extended family of the children of this church: thank you for the risky business of living on the edge of what it means to love. All week I felt challenged and grateful for it—to rise above petty judgments, to call upon my best self—even though I sometimes failed.
- † One image will always remain: the beauty of washing the bug-bitten, slightly grimy feet of 146 children as they sat around a plastic checkered tablecloth in the sanctuary meant to signify the upper room where Jesus and his disciples gathered on the night he gave himself up for us.
- † Pastor Dan from First Presbyterian Church, playing Jesus, asked the third and fourth graders an off-the-cuff question: “Who were some of the disciples?” One beautiful child, alight with love, raised her hand: “I am a disciple,” she proclaimed.

- † And then the rest of the class raised their hands, too. “I’m a disciple, I am! Me, too!” And then as we shared the 99 cent Safeway bargain sliced bread, your children held their hands open to receive the sign of Christ’s love in and for them. Your children knew the ropes of that adventure.
- † And what a precious gift of love and beauty it was—far more thrilling than any Xtreme sport in the world. Thank you. Keep up the good work. Amen.

Sources:

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