

Where Children Belong

Children's Sabbath, October 12, 2008

Whitefish UMC

Philippians 4

- † “There’s something delicious about writing the first words of a story; you never know where they will take you.” So says beloved children’s author Beatrix Potter, played by Renee Zellweger, in the opening scene of the movie, *Miss Potter*.
- † But as thrilling and mysterious as a new story may be, it doesn’t begin to compare to the wonder of a life unfolding into its own story of growth, joy, struggle, loss, wisdom, and grace.
- † Last week Jeanne and Bill Marcure recommended that I see *Miss Potter*, and I’m so glad I did. For it seems to me to be the perfect introduction to how I see our living out Paul’s wise words to the church at Philippi, this Children’s Sabbath.
- † Yes, the film is about the writing of the most popular children’s books of all time, *The Tales of Peter Rabbit and His Friends*. More importantly though, the film portrays beautifully the nurturing (or not) of a child and her dreams.
- † Eventually the shy little girl, whose only friends are the rabbits, ducks, squirrels, and frogs of her art and stories, becomes a grown woman—a spinster at that. Her drawing and her writing are her passion, her reason for living. But her mother wants her to marry a socially

- acceptable man, and her father, though a bit more encouraging just wants there to be peace in the household.
- † But a determined Beatrix carts her portfolio around to publishers in London, rejected until one finally agrees to produce her work in order to create an impossible task for a pesky younger brother who wants to enter the family business.
 - † Sounds like a fairy tale, doesn't it? And it almost is, but the reason fairy tales are so compelling is that they have the elements of our stories in them, too. It's why adults secretly love reading children's books, not just because they get to spend time with the little ones, but because they remember their dreams, too.
 - † So we, too shop our dreams around until someone takes them on along with us. In the film about Beatrix Potter, she finds someone who can share her dream—a business partner who becomes a friend who becomes something more than a friend. Along the way she develops an extended family that shares her passion.
 - † Beatrix's books become a great success, and she and the unlikely young publisher fall in love, but they are prevented from being together by her parents. Unspeakable grief ensues, and it is only when she is dragged out of her mourning by her friend and reminded of who she is and where her hope lies that she returns to herself and her work.
 - † At one point, her friend, the sister of her fiancé, says, "I'm so sorry that I encouraged you to love him—if I hadn't you wouldn't feel this grief." Beatrix replies with vehemence, "But I do love him, and I would never have given up that love to escape this sadness."

- † Beatrix works through her grief by finding new expressions of her work, by becoming a conservationist of the English countryside that she loves, and continuing to exceed the expectations of her parents.
- † Now why bother with this charming but maybe superfluous movie? I think because we as a church family are meant to find each other's stories as mysterious and thrilling as the best book or film. And our church is meant to encourage our children and each other in finding work and meaning that enhances our own self-worth while making a difference in the community and the world.
- † How are we doing? At youth group Wednesday night, we asked these young people to say what they want to give and what's important to them about this church community.
- † Here's what they have to say:
- † Paul's words: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."
- † The last month or so has tested our faith and our confidence. But I find us drawing one another back to ourselves and our dreams for our lives and our world. Of course there is sadness, but there is such deep peace in knowing we are not alone, that we have one another.
- † "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things

you have learned and received and heard and seen in me,” said Paul,
“and the God of peace will be with you.”

† May it be so, now and forever. Amen.