

What Are We Teaching Our Children?

Psalm 78:1-8

Wilton Presbyterian Church

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Its been quite a week. No matter where you are on the political spectrum, this election period in the life of our nation has been riddled with high anxiety and division, the volume of which has been turned way up. And it is staggering to me how vastly different people's narratives about the election process are, depending on the information sources they listen to, and depending on how certain they are about how right their information source is AND how wrong all other information is. It's no secret. The electoral map has been illustrating it all week. We are a divided nation. That's stressful.

And then there's Covid. Rates are rising here in town, and across our state, which was once considered one of the nation's safest areas. The feeling, as all the experts have warned us, that we are in for a rougher time is beginning to set in, right as people are preparing for the holidays. But again, people have been responding to the pandemic based on politics as well.

Quite frankly, I had a difficult time writing this sermon. I knew that I had to wait until after election day... but by Thursday afternoon, I still didn't have much that had really come together. And I was worried... because I knew I needed to get something to my editor daughter. I snapped at the two people in my household, whom I love... and then I took a walk. And was drawn back to the bigger picture.

As adults, we have our own coping mechanisms, for better or worse... but in the midst of it all... I wonder what we are teaching our children? In our words and in our actions... both within our families and on a societal scale, how are we caring for our precious ones who have a whole

lifetime ahead of them? How can we show resiliency, so they are not wounded by this time but come out of this time better able to cope with the world in which we live? That's no small ask.

Once again, I am grateful for the lectionary, because it provides a smattering of 4 texts from which to choose, and Psalm 78 is perfect for our good word today. It is a word for us and our children... and that is:

"We will tell... the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might and the wonders he has done. (vs.4)

And then the text continues building up to the why of that statement. Verse 7 tells us:

so that they (our children) should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

We need to tell our children about the wonders of God so that they can have hope in God and live accordingly. What a message for us AND for them.

This is one of the longest Psalms that exists... at 72 verses... and it is a litany for the children of Israel to remember all of the incidents of their fickle faith... which was met time and time again, over thousands of years with God's faithfulness, love, mercy and loyalty.

The word used in Hebrew used here is Chesed (חֶסֶד, also Romanized hesed). It is central to Jewish ethics and Jewish theology and is a common term in the Bible for describing God's love for humankind and God's special relationship with the Children of Israel. God has lovingkindness, loyalty, covenant mercy towards Gods people.

God's chesed was shown through the ages when the children of Israel suffered greatly... first when they were enslaved in Egypt. God came and lead them out with the help of Moses, even parting the red sea for their escape. They were hungry when wandering in the wilderness and complained. God gave them manna. Then they complained because they

wanted meat... so God gave them quail and so on... each time the people complained, God continued to meet their need and provide for them. Time and time and time again, God showed up and provided... and still God faithfully shows up and provides for us.

That's good news... news worth banking on and worth sharing with everyone we know... especially right now... but especially with our children, so that they may have hope and live accordingly. God faithfully shows up with lovingkindness, and mercy... meeting our needs.

But that becomes difficult to do unless you and I are clear about our own stories about how God has been faithful in our lives... In our family's life... In our community's life...

So, how has God shown up for you? Where have you seen God's presence in your life, in the life of our church? Many say God shows up most vividly in the life of community, in how we care not only for one another, but for the least among us. I've seen that recently here. People rallying around those in need both in and beyond our congregation. It's quite beautiful.

I was part of an online discussion the other night with clergy from around the country, and the questions were posed: What difference does your church make? If it were gone tomorrow, would anyone miss it in the neighborhood? And then, the most important question was asked... What does it matter that we say we believe in Jesus the Christ? Does it make any difference in our daily lives?

Those of us in the mainline church may feel uncomfortable with that type of language, but if we are to be authentic and give our children a hope which is grounded in faith, even in the most difficult of times, we have to model and articulate what our faith is about. If we're uncomfortable with the language of faith, our children will be as well.

I haven't always been good at doing that. I grew up in a tradition which was fairly rigid. It took a lot to blast me out of that form of faith which

was based more on excluding people for what they believed rather than including and loving them unconditionally as God does. While that hyper-personalized ~~ focused only on a personal relationship with Jesus, allowed me to look at personal sin, it didn't allow me to see the pain caused by the systems of which human beings are a part: systems which elevate white people above all others, those with money, power, and education, and those with able bodies and minds, and which elevate only heterosexual relationships. My faith was focused only on personal transformation and not on systemic justice making.

God's work in the Hebrew scriptures and then Jesus' work in the New Testament was about both confronting both personal and societal ills and bringing about transformation.

To bring real hope, to experience real transformation, which is life-giving and which brings true joy, we need to walk the path of naming personal and corporate sin, practice repentance so we may all be free and live life abundantly. The thing is, children get this. They understand fairness and equality in a way that often surprises adults. If we're not talking about that, they know.

So, what **are** we teaching our children about their belovedness to God? About God's faithfulness throughout history? Are we telling them God is present right here and now and still at work to give them and us hope? And What are we telling them about what's going on right now in our country? About why we're stressed? What are we telling them about racial injustice? About how we and our ancestors before us have failed time and time again to create a world which is just for all, the way God wants it to be? How are we talking about God's chesedness for all human beings?

Swedish Theologian Krister Stendahl once said, "Love does not seek equals; it creates them."

God has and continues to show us, time and time and time again... We are all beloved... you and I are beloved... our neighbors who may have voted differently than we did are beloved;

May we see as God sees... and teach our children accordingly.

May it be so... Alleluia! Amen.