

Reflection for Sunday, November 15, 2020

Children's Sabbath

Let me add my welcome and thanks to Stephen's. It is always a joy and a privilege to worship with you.

Today is what is known as Children's Sabbath. The Children's Sabbath is a weekend that unites places of worship and all faiths across the nation in shared concern for children and common commitment to improving children's lives and working for justice on their behalf. It is our Sunday to reflect about how we can live out that commitment. We pray for the Spirit's strength and wisdom to know the most loving way to make sure each of God's children have what they need not only to survive but to thrive.

I want you to think back on your own childhood to a carefree moment...a moment when joy and laughter just bubbled out of you. For me it is just a simple summer afternoon, the gentle wind rustling the leaves in the trees, the warm sun, the green grass- playing pretend in the backyard with my sisters. I can picture my mom gardening while my dad works in the horse paddock. Simple. Amazing. I hope you all have a memory like that.

But the [reality for many kids](#) is very different. They have needs. [They suffer](#). And especially today in the CO VID era -they worry. They need their emotions to be noticed and acknowledged. That is what the Children's Sabbath is all about. It is about adults in the church saying we see you, we know your suffering, and we will show you the possibilities for a different way with God's love and justice.

Last weekend was the annual youth and young adult retreat for our region. Like everything else this year we met virtually. Although we missed being in each other's presence and all the holy shenanigans 150 young people can get up to, we were grateful for the amazing speakers and the meaningful worship experiences. Our theme was "Participating in Hope." In some ways, it was the perfect theme for this year, and in some ways it was a really challenging theme. Rodger Nishioka, one of the keynote speakers, told us that Hope is keeping confidence in God whose goodness and mercy are to be relied on and whose promises cannot fail. God keeps God's promises.

The scripture passage from Isaiah today tells about God's promise to create new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah invites us into a vision of what life can be for God's faithful people. It was written in a time of exile, when the Israel people were in need of hope and the prospect that things could and would be different. And they were figuring out how to be God's people during times of struggle. Throughout Israel's exile, God continues to yearn for Israel's transformation into a community of righteousness and wholeness. Because of God's love, God will never abandon God's people.

Rodger Nishioka told us about two different types of verbs. I confess to not paying a lot of attention to grammar, so these were new for me. The first is Punctiliar - meaning an action that has been completed, it's accomplished finished. The other is Durative – an action that is continuous, ongoing, not bound by time, never finished. That is the work of hope, it is continuous, ongoing. I think we have a false impression of hope. That it is something we just have, something that is passive. However, hoping is not a spectator sport. It takes persistence. It requires us to live into our hope, our faith, to live into God's new creation.

I wonder when hope came easy to you. I wonder if there has ever been a time that hope was hard, when you have had to hold onto hope.

When violence or tragedy or pandemics devastates communities, good people ask if God has forsaken them, and some despair. It is tempting, and even understandable, to give in to despair. During the Babylonian exile, many did despair; in our own day, in the face of natural disaster, illness, violence and seemingly random tragedy, many still do despair. Nevertheless, as people of faith, we are called upon to make a different choice. We are called upon to persevere in the face of injustice, and to stand strong while we address the violence of our own day. We are called upon to hope, to love, to work for justice. We are called to use our imagination to envision the new creation God has planned, and to live that hope. We are meant to emulate Isaiah's unyielding conviction that God's plan is a restored world of righteousness and mercy. When we resolve to persist, we are empowered to seek out the injustice that afflicts our communities and replace it with just and merciful options. As God exposes the failures of our society, our trust in God allows us to use the tools of truth and justice to act as agents of restoration.

Sadly, much of the violence in our own day is targeted at children. Even in our wealthy nation allows children are hungry, homeless, even abused. The Children's Defense Fund (which organizes Children's Sabbath) compiles shocking facts about the devastation in the lives of American children. Though these stats are American; things are not the much different here up north.

Among them are:

- Persistent Hunger – day after day, hope-draining hunger affects the lives of 8.3 million American children.
- Deep Poverty – the humiliations and pains of abiding need haunt the lives of 7.1 million children.

Some will respond to these facts with apathy or despair; we know a better way. As people of faith, we can dare to comprehend the scope of injustices our children face because we know that, with God's help, we can address them. We can help to bring about change and restoration. The Children's Sabbath is a good opportunity to reassess the needs of children in our church, community, and nation. We can take inspiration from the lions of justice in our past century — Bishop Desmond Tutu, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi — they did not succumb to persecution, or to powerful forces of injustice; they were agents of transformation because they dared to be. Like them, we are actual human beings with the full range of strengths and weaknesses, and like them, we are called to be God's agents in the world. We don't need to be perfect; we need to be perfectly ready to act. We are all called to participate in God's plan of compassionate restoration. God never forsakes us, and we need not forsake each other.

Another speaker from Evolve was Jack Saddleback, a two-spirited Cree activist from Saskatoon. He asked us a question that has stuck with me. "How do I be a good ancestor?". I think this is a particularly poignant question for Children's Sabbath. How do we leave the world the best place possible for our children and their children? How do we leave it more habitable, kinder, more loving, more hopeful for all God's children.

I know the people of this community of faith care deeply for children. I have seen it in how you care for and brag about your families. In all the pictures of beautiful grandchildren you share. I see it in the Carrot Seed kids playing in the p I have seen it in your participation in Messy Church. I have seen it in how you welcomed a newcomer family from Syria. I have seen it in every stitch knitted for sweaters to

be sent overseas. I have seen it in the commitment to the families and communities in Tanzania.

In light of Covid, Children's Sabbath this year in particular allows us the opportunity to take a fresh look at the needs of children in the neighborhoods where we worship, work, and live; and then discover ways to address or meet those needs as people of God.

I find hope in knowing that God is creating something new. I find hope that I am not alone in the journey of discovery about how to walk with the vulnerable children in our world. I take hope in prayer.

I wonder what practices of hope you are practicing these days?
 I wonder how you are working towards justice for God's children?
 I wonder how you are being a good ancestor?
 I wonder how I can be an agent of God's new creation?

*You, beloved, are not in darkness...
 you are all children of light and children of the day. —1 Thessalonians 5.4-5*

God, my Light,
 shine in me this day.
 Fill the night of my fear with your dawn.
 Redeem the night of my bitterness with your grace.
 Transform the night of my despair with your love.
 Be my dawn, my rising sun,
 my steady light.
 May I bear your light
 into the shadows of this world.
 Let me shine with your love,
 your hope, your truth.
 Light of love, shine in me.

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