

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST in SIMI VALLEY
Pentecost Sunday/Memorial Day Sunday - May 30, 2004
Theme for May: Everyday Spirituality
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Acts 2:1-21

For Our Reflection:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.
- Romans 8:14-17a (NRSV)

Everyday Spirituality: Inheritance

Inheritance is a big deal to a lot of people. It is the source of some amount of contention among many of those same people. And the level of conflict is usual in proportion to a person's definition of "enough" and their perception of whether or not they have received "enough" - of anything (tangible or intangible) in their lives. If deprivation of any kind has caused a sense of entitlement to "what is left" - get out of the way at the funeral. At that point inheritance has nothing to do with the objects involved.

Possessions often become the metaphor and substitute for love, security or attention. Possessions also provide varying levels of power, influence and status. Possessions coupled with generosity can generate some creative solutions to social problems - as we can all attest to our social inheritance from the Carnegie family, the Eli Lilly family and others. And possessions paired with generosity AND a rummage sale can redistribute wealth in some fairly satisfying ways.

Inheritance brings with it mixed blessings. Speaking genetically - we can see this in combinations of beautiful red hair with lousy eye-sight, a head for figures but no aesthetic sensibility, creative talent with no common sense.

The down side of inheritance includes objects which we never wanted in the first place and are expected to "keep in the family." We become the stewards of Uncle Max's inexpert (might we say ugly) oil paintings that are framed and anticipating a place over the mantel. Then there are grandma's seriously chipped but antique and beloved tea cups, the taxidermied pets, the Queen Anne dining room set, the early Victorian, late Bo Beep parasol. These, too, are part of the responsibility of inheritance and it is up to us to help these items stay in the family - or get them into a collection at the local historical society - like my mother-in-law's beautiful (but pool table sized) exact replica dollhouse of her recently sold Wallace Neff home.

Inheritance is a social strategy created millennia ago in order for men to provide security - even survival - for widows and children when the husband/father died. And it was deemed legal to leave provision for adopted children as well as genetic progeny - expanding the definition of family - perhaps to preserve the legacy and memory of a person unfortunate enough to have had no blood family.

Another intention, as I see it, is to leave something of meaning and value in the hands of those who will protect and build upon that gift for future generations. And with that intention comes deep and often unrecognized expectations that are easily disappointed. If we inherit brains and good looks, we are expected to be smarter and prettier than our parents and give birth to smarter and prettier children.

The first generation to go to college is a sign of profound success in this area.

If we inherit land, we are to improve upon that land, even add to the acreage, for the next generation.

And money - well - if we can't grow that in our modern society and pass it's expanding worth on - what good are we? From the numbers of suicides in the U.S. stock market crash and depression of the 1920's I'd say "not much, according to our societal expectations."

There is also the inheritance of meaningful and valuable ideas. The history of philosophy is a building upon the ideas of the last generation. The industrial age has been the growing inheritance of generations of innovation and experimentation. Democracy, we can hope, is an inheritance that has developed from great ideas of the past and become better because of what we have learned. It is something we value - as we have women and men fighting and dying to protect Democracy and Freedom and World Community and other such ideas - every day. These are the people we honor on Memorial Day.

Families have, consciously or unconsciously, passed down an intricate matrix of "family values" - many of which were subverted in the United States in the 1960's - which was part of the excitement and pain of those years. Marion Wright Edelman wrote a book for her children with essays about the values she hoped her children would inherit and pass on. Because she did it in published form, her values may now be inherited by a million strangers - quite an expansion of the trust!

Which brings us to the mixed blessings of our spiritual inheritance: As Judeo-Christians we have inherited an oral tradition that evolved into a published tradition that has evolved into a less than polite discourse of beliefs and interpretations - (courtesy being one of my family values). One minister when confirming a class of young people in his church handed each one of them a Bible with the back cover torn off. He instructed them to go forth and continue to build on the tradition - write their own faith stories - add to the inheritance. I have to say that his approach seems more in line with the spirit of our ancestors in faith - than does the closed canon of Constantine and the current Christian regime.

The earliest Christians, being Jewish, had deep cultural concerns about their faith communities and who was a legal heir to the tradition - the promises made by God to a Chosen People. In the spirit of Jesus' open table and his challenge to take the message of God's Beloved Community to all nations, there was an assertion that God is able to adopt ANYONE in the "True Faith." Gentiles were allowed to become Jews through spiritual adoption and inherit - inherit what?

Well - there's the promise of land and generations of progeny that was given to Abraham, the father of Judaism.

There's the promise of resurrection and everlasting life given to those who choose to follow a particular Messiah or Christ named Jeshua or Jesus.

Our inheritance includes thousands of years of tradition, the support of a believing community (aka synagogue or church), a personal advocate for our salvation in the form of the Holy Spirit, a huge obligation to love and care for each other - as well as the widows, orphans, homeless, sick and otherwise socially unacceptable folks.

And, according to the story of Pentecost, we have been given Spiritual Gifts which are to be used, like it or not, in the furtherance of God's plan for humankind. Of course, God's plan is up for interpretation - so our gifts often get used in counter-productive endeavors. But there is merit in doing our best with what we have inherited.

What are some of the spiritual gifts that you can name from our tradition - or from personal experience?

(Congregational Response)

And how do you intend to use these gifts in furthering God's plan for Simi Valley?

(Congregational Response)

May it be so - with the blessings of our ancestors.

Bulletin

WE GATHER FOR PRAYER AND CELEBRATION

Music for Gathering

Welcome and Perspective on the Day

Musical Preparation for Worship - A Time for Centering

+ Call to Worship (Unison)

We covenant to worship God; to live the good news of God's love as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus; to gather in faithful community to seek righteousness, justice, and peace, and to render loving service to all of God's creation.

+ Opening Hymn

A Child of God CSB # 40

+ Opening Declaration (unison)

We are a Christian community empowered by God to create an atmosphere for spiritual growth and learning in order to experience the reality of God. We celebrate and embrace our diversities as we support one another in partnership with God in creation. We are committed to use our resources to provide a dependable source of Christian love as we minister to the needs of the local and global communities.

+ Our Common Prayer (unison)

Creator God who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,
on Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts
As we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the kingdom and the power
And the glory forever. Amen.

Time for Silent Reflection (you may be seated)

One: My soul waits in silence.

All: God is my rock and my fortress. I will be at peace.

Silent Reflection

The Assurance of Good News (unison)

As children of God, we inherit all that is given by God.

Sung Response "Hallelujah. God be praised!" (CSB #5 Refrain)

WE TEACH, REFLECT AND PROCLAIM

The Just Peace Reflection was introduced to our worship service by our Just Peace Committee. It is a weekly reminder of the need for social justice in order to create a peaceful world.

Just Peace Reflection

Conversation with Our Children

Reading from the Christian Scriptures Acts 2:1-21

Sermon Everyday Spirituality: Inheritance

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S INVITATION

Intercessions, Celebrations and Encouragements

Call to Prayer Be still and know that I am God

Time for Silence

Hymnal # 743

Our Joys and Concerns and an Offering of Prayer
Sung Response In Solitude Hymnal #521 vv. 1 & 2

We Offer Our Gifts So That Our Lives May Be Our Prayer
Offertory

Prayer of Dedication (unison)

May our gifts flow easily from our hands because we accept compassion and sharing as appropriate to the life of faith. May our gifts flow easily from us because we identify with Christ's gracious and supportive ministry to others. May gifts flow easily from us because the Spirit of God desires to heal the world and repair its brokenness through our work, even now, even here. Amen.

+ Sending Hymn Come, O Spirit, Dwell Among Us Hymnal # 267

+ Benediction (unison)

God of power, may the boldness of your Spirit transform us, may the gentleness of your Spirit lead us, may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to serve and worship you now and always, in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen.

+ Sung Response (we gather in some semblance of a circle)

Hymnal # 236

Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja, Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja, Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja,
Halleluja, halleluja.

+ Postlude

WORSHIP NOTES

Call to Worship is the church COVENANT STATEMENT 1994

Opening Prayer is the church MISSION STATEMENT 1995, as printed in the By-Laws
(slightly adapted for reading in worship)

Benediction is adapted from: In Spirit and In Truth: A Worship Book

for the World Council of Churches Seventh Assembly 1991 (p.29, #53)