

## Reflection: Legacy

Genesis 15:1-6, Psalm 27 with response; Luke 13:31-35

As you know, I don't have children. But I do have a fair number of children in my life, and I have a goddaughter, who also happens to be my niece, Tayah. I've never been all that disappointed about not having kids, partly because I think it's really important for children to have a *non*-relative in their lives who cares about them, looks out for them, and tries to model a positive way of living. In my niece's case, it's been a really wonderful thing to be living in the same city, to get together nearly every week, to walk and talk and swim and have sleepovers. We talk about small things and big, and I try to reinforce the things my sister is teaching her about how to live, and especially, how to live as a follower of Jesus. Andrea was telling me that Tayah has a little friend who goes to a fundamentalist church, and this friend had told Tayah that people who don't believe in Jesus will go to Hell. Tayah said to her Mum, "We don't believe that, do we?" And her Mum was able to affirm that "No, we don't believe that in our church." This is the kind of Christian upbringing I'd hope that we, together, can give the children in our lives: a strong commitment to Jesus that does not exclude others from the circle of God's love.

The readings from Genesis and the Psalm got me thinking about children, and the legacy we want to leave them. In the ancient world, children were seen as the ultimate blessing. Together with possession of land, they were seen as a sign of God's favour. Story after story from the Hebrew Bible reminds us of how important children were. They insured the family's survival; they would hold the land; they were, in many ways, their parents' immortality. I don't imagine that ancient people were too different from us, in the hopes and dreams they had for their children. Beyond simple survival, which was a big accomplishment in those days, they would have wanted them to learn and grow and flourish, to be safe and sheltered from harm, to have a secure and confident future. They would have wanted, too, to pass on the faith: to have their children experience the strength that comes from living in God's way. In Baptism, we commit, as parents and as a congregation, to passing the faith on to our little ones. But what is it that we want to pass along?

Being a Christian parent, grandparent, Godparent or mentor of the liberal, progressive or emerging Christian type – pick the language you like – can be really challenging. There are lots of resources out there that come from a conservative perspective. Websites, music, movies and video games, board games, toys, etc. Christian bookstores flourish across North America, and the vast majority of their stock comes from the evangelical American publishers. Even a children's Bible can be a problem, as I found when looking for gifts for my niece. Take a look at a children's Bible some time. What kind of theology do you see reflected in its pages? Are there stories about women as well as men? Is there a lot of sacrificial imagery? Are the people depicted all blonde and blue-eyed, or do they reflect racial diversity? Which stories are included and which ones left out? Even the little Bible story book we give at Baptism has a line or two I'd rather weren't there.

As adults, we need to help each other find resources that reflect the way we understand our faith. When I get something for my niece I always take a good look at it first, and I try to purchase items created by companies affiliated with some of the more liberal churches or with multi-faith organizations. If it's published by a conservative organization, I flag any concerns with my sister so that she can discuss them with Tayah. Likewise with the resources we use

in worship and in Sunday School: we use a curriculum published by the United Church of Canada, along with music resources, craft suggestions, Children's stories, etc that reflect the way we in the UCC understand Christian faith.

One of the things we can teach children is that there's more than one understanding of how to be a faithful follower of Jesus. We can encourage them to ask questions, to wonder, and to keep learning and growing. Often in ministry I run across people who appear to have stopped learning and growing in their faith when they left Sunday School – usually at the age of around 12. Many of the people I know who have *rejected* Christianity are rejecting a child's faith; they have never been helped or taken the opportunity themselves to develop a mature faith that can wrestle with the questions of human living. I like the line from Psalm 27 “One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.”. Worship, and inquiry; shelter and beauty; wonder and questioning are all part of the life of faith.

In addition, we are a church that has always resonated with the prophetic tradition of the Bible: the words of those who have called people to faithful dealings with each other not just in the private sphere, but in the public arena. Jesus identified himself as a prophet – one who spoke truth to power. That's what got him killed! He also spoke as one who had great compassion, wanting to gather people in and shelter them from that which would hurt and destroy. Christian faith as understood by the United Church tradition is one of hard questions, not easy answers; of commitment to positive action in the world; of deep compassion for the lost and those on the margins of society. This is the legacy we have to pass onto the next generation.

Lest it feel like that may be too difficult or complex a legacy, let me say also that the legacy we share is one of comfort and strength, of inspiration and hope. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” “I believe I shall see the goodness of God in the land of the living.” What a tremendous hope we have! What a wonderful assurance!

Each one of us today has a legacy of faith to share with the little ones among us. Each one of us still can grow and learn and mature in faith, whether we are 2 or 102. Each one of us may pray with the Psalmist, “Teach me your way, O Lord, and direct my paths.” Each one of us may know God to be our shelter, our rock, our light, our salvation. So what I have to say to you is this: Pass it on, friends; pass it on.