

February 3, 2008
Communion Sunday

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MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Adventures in Character Building

Romans 12:9-18

In the passage from Romans, Paul is writing of the day to day realities of following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. The steps are difficult, yet essential. Growing in faith has little to do with the number of our days, but rather with the depth of our devotion. How long have you been on your journey of faith? How have you matured in faith? What is your next step on your journey with God?

These are the questions we ask ourselves as we move forward on the path of faith. It was Aristotle who taught that people do not naturally become morally excellent or practically wise. They become so, if at all, only as the result of lifelong personal and community effort.

Prayer

The journey of faith is both a personal and communal effort. We gather as community connected by God's love for us and our willingness to journey with each other. The goal is not to just move through our years together, but to grow in our relationship with the Divine and with each other.

Psychiatrist Frank Pittman is credited with saying, "The stability of our lives depends upon character." In this imperfect world, it is character that enables people to survive, to endure and to transcend their misfortunes." To that I would add that character born out of faith also knows joy and blessing in the midst of the realities of living.

Paul speaks to the character of the follower of Christ. He speaks to the dos and don'ts of living out our faith. Copy this passage; put it on the mirror in the bathroom or the refrigerator door. These are great words for how we go about living in the world. These words provide us a guide that encourages us to get up, get focused and live out our faith.

I can remember her as if it were just last week. We are about the same age. She was only about three feet tall and six years old at the time. Her name - Ruby Bridges. You may remember her. She was a first grader who was ordered by a judge to attend the all white William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans in 1960. Ruby was the only

black child to attend William Frantz. On her first day of school and for weeks following, Ruby would walk through a mob of adults hurling insults at her. Ruby was protected by four U.S. deputy marshals who walked beside her. I would not know the name of her teacher until years later. Barbara Hurley watched Ruby as she walked through the crowd and marveled at her cool, calm demeanor. One day she asked Ruby what Ruby was saying as she made that walk into the building. Ruby replied that she prayed. She prayed each day before school and after school and during the walk through the crowd. She prayed that God would get her through the day and that God would forgive those people saying such bad things. (Building Moral Intelligence by Michele Borba)

Ruby Bridges, young in age, mature in faith. She was six years old, turning the tide of this nation and doing it with character based on faith. For me, she is the light of Epiphany shining through that dark time in history. She was then, exactly the person that God calls each of us to become.

The blueprint for our character in Christ is before us. "Love must be sincere. Cling to what is good. Honor one another. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Bless those who persecute you: bless and do not curse. Live in harmony with one another." Ultimately, it is how we live our days that matter. Sure we can declare what we believe and what we hold dear, but it is the living of our days that actually provides the proof of our discipleship.

In conversations with our children and with one another, we have key words of our faith to be expressed often: honor, gratitude, respect, accountability, honesty, trust, tenacity, peace, patience, hope, obedience, service, grace, joy, humility, mercy, compassion, hospitality, discipline, hope, empathy, integrity. How often are we using the words of our faith in the conversations of our days? How often are we using the words of our faith in conversations with one another in this sacred place? The words of our faith shape our intentions. Our intentions shape our practices and the practice of our faith each day shapes our living.

I remember after the earthquake in California in 1995, the days were long and arduous. It was an overwhelming moment in time. There was the loss of our own home, but also the loss for all those in the church and community around us. There was no chance of getting away from the pain, misery, loss and grief. At one point, about three months after the initial earthquake another strong aftershock sent items flying through the air again. Exhausted, discouraged, and feeling completely out of control, I fell to my knees and cried out to God, "If this is to build my character, stop! I have enough character thank you very much!"

I was right and I was wrong. I was right to fall on my knees before God. I was right to cry out and honor the fact that I could not control the situation and that try as I might I

would find no easy way out. But I was wrong that I have enough character. I will never have enough character of faith. I do not yet have the character of six year old Ruby Bridges. My character based on my faith is still under construction. I will always be seeking to grow in grace and gratitude.

Ours is a journey of faith in this lifetime and in the life beyond. Ours is a journey that builds up, that encourages, that blesses and fills heart and soul with the love of God.

We come to this table of grace this morning as the honored guests of Jesus Christ. Paul gives us the blueprint for the living of our days; Aristotle the encouragement to make the process a lifelong pursuit. As we prepare to be served communion this morning, please consider the question before you. How is your faith expressed in your daily living? What difference has your faith journey made on your life? You do not have to sign your response, but do consider how your presence in this faith community has changed your life. For ultimately, transformation by God's grace is the reason we gather. As we continue to grow as the Body of Christ, we will become ever more attentive to creating an environment where transformation is our expectation each and every time we gather to worship.