

Texts: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Psalm 15; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23; Rabbi Daniel

Title: Teaching our children's children; recognizing transcendence

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Introduction:

During my three years here at St Catherine's and especially during this past month at our gatherings looking back and looking forward, I have heard about your children and your grandchildren, your nieces, nephews. And for those of you my age and younger, I have heard about your friends and peers.

I have heard your heart to see the people you love flourish.

- A longing for these beloved ones to find community,
- discover Love,
- open to ethics of diversity and care for those in need like refugees fleeing Afghanistan,
- flourish in intergenerational friendship,
- be inspired to care for Earth,
- walk the ways that lead to forgiveness and right relationship
- and be sustained by the nourishment of transcendence, the God of their understanding and experience.

We have wondered about where people go for ethical conversation and how wisdom is transferred in loving relationships.

We have expressed sorrow that there are few places in our world where generational wisdom and ethical conversations can take place in an open and non-judgemental way.

And we have expressed our longing for the community of St Catherine's to become such a place.

I have heard this deep hunger and yearning.

Today we have read in the Deuteronomistic history of the nation of Israel – probably a reflective text written during the Babylonian exile, about the instruction to instill in our children, and in their children, the experiences of faith.

"But take care (the Hebrew text reads) and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children"

This nation, in the midst of their own captivity became reflective on:

- their journey from Egypt through the wilderness,
- to the time of a change over of leadership from Moses to Joshua,
- to their time of entering and establishing their presence in a new land,

- to their desire for stability and kingship,
- to the demise of the Kings and now their time being ruled by another nation in Babylon.

They wondered about the things they were instructed to do, and the things they failed to do.

We have an example from a Jewish Rabbinical saying, being passed down from one generation to the next, a way of balance, a path of humility, and the importance of a sense of purpose, when we feel like giving up.

And we have in our gospel an example of Jesus' strong invitation to reconsider traditional ways of external cleansing; when they have, often unintentionally, become exclusionary.

Where love and action parted ways.

You see by reinforcing strict laws of eating, the religious rulers of this time maintained the fence around the Jewish community. This is how they particularly defined who was Jewish and who was not.

Jesus disputes their exclusive claim. He takes apart the foundation of their claim.
(Ched Myers *Binding the Strong Man*)

In light of these readings and in light of our yearning for the flourishing of those we love, our peers, our children, our children's children, our nieces, our nephews...

I have been pondering the offerings of the Anglican Church.
And I invite you this morning to join me...

Each parish offers to the wider community the sacrament of Baptism.

- Often a family seek to have their child baptized
- It is sometimes the first contact we have with young families in the neighborhood
- As a Priest, I meet with the family several times
- The parents and I talk about the meaning of baptism, the church, their experiences of God's presence, God's absence and the ways they can open up their child's life to the ways of faith.
- And then we gather here and we bless water, we tell the Judeo- Christian story
- The parents, god-parents and community make promises
- We baptize a child in the name of God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- There is water, there is the light of Christ and there is oil
- It is beautiful, it is an initiation into this family of God - where there are role models and examples of faith.

The invitation is extended for families to join the parish community's life of worship and prayer.

Imagine yourself as a young family with schedules and work and bills to pay and the flurry of life in our technologically driven world.

- What prayers would be most meaningful?
- What spiritual practices would be most helpful?
- What pressure are they experiencing that being part of a faith community could relieve?
- How can we support this family to flourish?

And then some years later, we invite a child back to consolidate their Christian faith, learn about Anglican identity, and the meaning of baptism and the Bishop offers confirmation.

I wonder if this container we offer for the life, experience and questions of faith is sufficient? I invite you to wonder with me.

Richard Rohr in a series of lectures – True Self, False Self – reflects on the human journey of transcendence. He bases his teachings on a book called The Biology of Transcendence, A Blue print of the Human Spirit by scientist Joseph Chilton Pearce.

Rohr says that there are moments through our development as humans where we are so connected to the transcendent – the experience of the nearness of a God beyond time, beyond space. It is an experience of the heart, of the body.

He says this is when the True Self, that part of us that knows we are beloved before we do or say anything, is easily accessed.

Rohr asks the Christian community whether our teaching and raising of children honours this inherent experience of God?

John O Donnahue writes a blessing that captures this same idea called: As a child enters the world:

As I enter my new family,
May they be delighted
At how their kindness
Comes into blossom.
Unknown to me and them,
May I be exactly the one
To restore in their forlorn places
New vitality and promise.
May the hearts of others
Hear again the music
In the lost echoes
Of their neglected wonder.
If my destiny is sheltered,

May the grace of this privilege
Reach and bless the other infants
Who are destined for torn places.
If my destiny is bleak,
May I find in myself
A secret stillness
And tranquility
Beneath the turmoil.
May my eyes never lose sight
Of why I have come here,
That I never be claimed
By the falsity of fear
Or eat the bread of bitterness.
In everything I do, think,
Feel, and say,
May I allow the light
Of the world I am leaving
To shine through and carry me home.

~ John O'Donohue ~. (To Bless the Space Between Us)

And then there are the teen years.

Reflecting on this Richard Rohr writes:

"Teens are much more sensitive to peer approval than they were as children or will be as adults. We often see this in teenagers as a desire to do something wonderful, to be someone great, to connect with something momentous. It's actually transcendence they are searching for."

But because there aren't living models around them of saints, of mystics, of people who've got the big picture, they settle for rock stars, movie stars, or professional athletes.
That's the only greatness offered to them in a secular culture. They will try to become rich or famous, which looks like greatness.

If, Rohr writes, ...

between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, the young person has both models and enough nurturance (and maybe even an experience of initiation), the visionary, idealistic worldview takes off for the rest of his or her life. That's why such a person is never satisfied and keeps searching for more transcendence, yearning for closer connection with God, with others, and with the universe.

I invite you to wonder with me, what a faith community looks like that offers nurture for transcendence.

Friends, as the church Father Iraneus writes: "The Glory of God, is a human being fully alive"

Another way of expressing our deep desire to see the ones we love flourish.

May our explorations and creation of Fresh Expressions in the Fall be an overflow of this heart of love.

Amen.