

So That Generations Might Know...

Intro - I am excited to be here. Greetings from the body of Christ at First United Methodist in Tulsa, OK. It has been wonderful to be a part of this Encounter weekend.

This morning we will focus on Psalm 78. #1 But the themes we will find here are also found elsewhere in Scripture. In addition to Psalm 78, I recommend a look at Psalm 145 and Deuteronomy chapters 5 – 10. That will be on your own later this week. ☺

But before we go to Psalm 78, let's look at a snapshot from the book of Judges:

#2 The book of Judges starts at a major transition: Caleb and Joshua – two heroes of the faith - are nearing the end of their lives. They are not gone yet....but a new generation is rising up and taking the reins of leadership.

Tell the story – short version

The book of Judges records that Joshua (who led the people after Moses) lived to be 110 years old before being buried in the land of his inheritance. Joshua had been an incredible leader and a mighty man of God.....but with his death came a major shift in the spiritual landscape.

Listen to these verses from Judges, chapter 2:

#3 *“The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things that the Lord had done for Israel...#4* (However) after that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel.”

A whole generation had served God for a lifetime, but somehow failed to pass the torch in such a way that the next generation would know God personally. What a frightening and devastating possibility for a community of faith!

I'll say more about this another day, but I think the both risk of losing and the opportunity of winning the next generation have never been higher!

I want to look this morning at Psalm 78. Not only does it call us to “parent” the next generation, but it tells us how. **#5** This Psalm calls the entire community of faith to give the kind of spiritual care and nurture with modeling.....and boundaries.....and permission giving that raises more than “church kids,” but disciplinarians.

Will you read the first six verses out loud with me? Read slide...then **#6**...then **#7**

Isn't that the dream for all of us? To pass the faith on in such a way that children not yet born will be teaching their children? And what a promise that God has prepared a way. This is not magic. It is not a formula. But there is a methodology that Scripture credits God with establishing. And that is exciting.

The structure of Psalm 78 is that of a teacher speaking to the people. #8

The teacher calls the people to listen as he recounts the past. But this is not a lecture or a research report – this is the telling of a story. **#8a It is God’s story told with attention to where man’s story intersects.** I think that is significant. The story is told from God’s perspective, not human perspective. This story is not about us....it is about Him.

#8b It is significant as well that the past is not remembered for its own sake. This is not nostalgia. The past here is remembered for what it means for the present and the future.

Can someone stand and read loudly verses 5 and 6 for us in another translation? (Pause) #8c The teacher is obviously fulfilling a duty that has been established and ordained for every generation. The teacher is instructing the people about the peril and the promise of being the people of God.

Now one more thing before we dive into methodology for today: #9 Authentic ministry to the next generation is never intended to be the work of paid professionals or even dedicated groups of volunteers who set themselves apart from the rest of the Body of Christ for specialized ministry. Spiritually fathering the next generation is the calling and command of Scripture for the whole church body.

My starting point....and I hope yours....with this study is that if you are a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ, your responsibility is not to ask whether or not you should be involved in ministry to youth and children....but how!!! Now if I’ve lost you there, you might as well leave now, because you’re not going to like the next two months! ☺

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, renew our hearts and minds. Show us truth. Give us your heart for the next generation and make us like you we pray. Amen.*

First of all, Tell God’s Story. #10

As we have already mentioned, **the teacher is calling his listeners to remember the past. #10a** The very act of “remembering” is a huge part of discipleship. Reread the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. When Moses was working with a very adolescent group of Israelites in the desert....he called them over and over and over again to REMEMBER God’s faithfulness.

It is interesting to me that the God of the Scriptures is unafraid to let His people experience His power in exciting, emotional ways – even when He knows His people will often quickly bottom out on a roller coaster life with Him.

Too often we who are more experienced in life are afraid of emotion, because it has betrayed us too many times...yet the great and mighty God of our forefathers rejoiced in the opportunity to do mighty acts and wondrous deeds on behalf of His children. And He still does.

As we tell God’s great story....let us call one another to REMEMBER how He has met us and intervened on our behalf in the past.

We don't have the time in this setting to tell the stories...but if you have a memory of a specific time in your life when God intervened on your behalf....or worked in a miraculous ways for your good....will you stand for just a moment? Look around.

God, we thank you! As you have done in the past, do in our lives again!

As you tell and retell the story...use words. #10b The teacher says in the very first verse: “Listen to the words of my mouth.” I would hope this is obvious...but we are not to depend on the next generation guessing the condition of our heart or the hope for the reason that is within us.

It is absolutely insufficient for us to simply live a moral life in front of our children. We MUST intentionally use language...use words to tell our great God's story and to explain His motivation of passionate love for those created in His image.

10c In Deuteronomy, we see that Moses first called the people to remember God's mighty acts, and then he explained to the people what these acts meant. Social psychologists now know that starting to teach the “why” behind rules to children as young as age 3 creates a significant context for children moving from external motivation to internal motivation for right behavior.

As you teach the story of the God of our forefathers, **be aware that you are passing on identity and ethos** (*the fundamental character of the spirit of a culture*).

The community of faith provides a road map for identity while parents tell their children how they came to be. The story of the God of our community becomes the story of our God as we respond in trust and obedience.

Not only does the teacher in Psalm 78 call us to tell **Tell the Story**, it is clear we are to **Teach the Law**.

#11

According to verses 5 and 6, **calling to remembrance God's great story is just the beginning.** God has decreed statutes and established law that we are to teach the next generation. We are to be so compelling in our teaching that children not yet born will be teaching their children someday.

Does your family have any stories like that? Stories that have been in your family for generations and you pass them along?

- My family tells of **Captain Crocker**, a merchant who was outspoken in his hatred for the slave trade and had his ship commissioned at President Lincoln's request to fight in the Civil War.
- They tell of **Johann Reuber** who stowed away on a ship to escape the Nazi regime.
- They tell of **Samuel Moffat** and the building of the Moffat Tunnel
- They tell of **Uncle George** whose brainchild it was to put Riverfront Stadium on the Ohio River to revitalize downtown Cincinnati.
- They tell of **Great-Uncle Roberto** who saw his children executed before his eyes and was later forced out of retirement by the Argentine Government to lead the Falkland islands war against Great Britain.
- And my younger brother **John** - who is a missionary with OMS - tells of discovering Methodist institutions from an earlier generation founded in Uruguay by my mother's relatives.

Those are some of the stories, but there are also laws that are part of my heritage going back generations. Some were spoken and some were not. Some have been taught intentionally, others accidentally, but all have been lived with such passion that my grandchildren and their cousins will be passing them along to their kids.

A few examples:

- **Injustice at any level is to be fought and destroyed**
- *No matter what you've done, you can always come home*
- **Sports are essential part of life**
- *Money is irrelevant to happiness*
- **Adventure and education are to be embraced – even at great cost.**
- *There is no greater calling than to take the Gospel to someone who has never heard.*

How did we learn that stuff? A lot of it was talking around the meal table every night and Sunday afternoons. We talked about people and their stories. We learned about life from the telling and retelling. And my mom and dad were faithful to live out the values that we discussed.

How do you teach God's Law in such a way that generations remember? For one thing, we really are pretty successful at teaching those things that are most important to us. Ask the people in your family.....if you dare. They can tell you what is important in your life. (*If you want a less risky method, just inventory your checkbook, your Palm Pilot and your thought life. Those are the things that are most important to you and those are the things that will be impacting what you teach*) But beyond all that, the method of my parents was not original with them. Moses...David....Jesus all used the same pedagogy.

#11A. Remember often. #11b Build Ritual #11c Focus on Relationships and #11d make sure that Trust and Obedience are REAL in your own life.

Tell God's Story. Teach the Law. Let Trust Be the Response. #12

Not only does the teacher proclaim the Mighty Acts of God and the law He has established but she anticipates the response. The message here in Psalm 78 is the same message that is throughout Scripture – from the books of the law through the Incarnation in the Gospels to the Pauline epistles: Being a follower of our great and mighty God is not based on knowing a lot about Him – it is based on knowing him!

#12a Verse 7 makes clear the purpose of teaching the law. It is to prepare the next generation for a personal relationship with God. This is important. **Law makes grace possible. #12b** And get this “then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds, but would keep his commands.” **#12c** Trust and obedience are absolutely intertwined. **#12d** **And so the response that we teach for...pray for...hope for....the response that lasts..... is not one of knowledge or of conformity of behavior, but of trust and obedience.**

Permissiveness robs the next generation of the opportunity of knowing God in a fullness of trust. **Authoritarianism** keeps the next generation from discovering the full joy of an obedient heart. A response of trust can never be manipulated or controlled. Conformity of behavior is what we are after when we train animals. But faith is an issue of the heart. **We MUST trust God with our children so that they can trust God on their own.**

Tell God's story. Teach the Law. Let Trust be the Response. And most thrilling of all, the Final Word is Grace. #13

We don't have time this morning to examine the whole Psalm (there are still about 65 verses to go!), but if you read it later, you will notice a couple of things:

While the Psalm tells God's story...it also tells the story of our Hebrew forefathers and how they failed, and turned away and then repented and turned again to God. **OVER and OVER. #13a**

Thank the Lord...the ability of the next generation to have faith is not dependent on our ability to be faithful. It is dependent on God and His grace. The great irony in this Psalm - that every generation will have to deal with - is that those who are passing on the tradition are also those who will have failed it.

#14 And so, because of grace, when you tell the story, tell the whole story. **#14a** Be authentic. **#14b** Be real about your shortcomings and failures and downright sinfulness. **#14c** And cling to His grace. **#14d**

The dangers mentioned in this Psalm are the same now as they have always been:

The Hebrews were guilty of craving and demanding more than they had been given....and they were guilty of worshipping other things. These sins resulted in rebellion, lack of respect for authority, questioning God, refusing to believe God, self-reliance, and forgetting God and His mighty works.

- Have we been guilty of any or all of these things? Of course we have!
- Is God's grace and mercy sufficient to forgive us and allow us to pass the faith to the next generation anyway? Absolutely!

The end of this Psalm is God's exclamation point of Grace. God chooses David to be an undershepherd, to care for his people in the same way that God has shepherded them. **#15** David represents the grace of God. He also gives us a model – Verse 72 says that *“David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.”*

We need to learn and know what we are doing – skillful hands are good. We need also to have integrity of heart which only God can give. And we need to be ambassadors of God's grace.

What we have seen in Psalm 78 today? #16 Let me make a few suggestions of what I hope caught and stuck! **#16a**

- There is a clear ordained responsibility to teach the next generation that belongs to the whole family of faith whether or not they have biological children
- Our model is that of an ambassador of God's grace...a shepherd with skillful hands and integrity of heart. We are all called to be grace---full spiritual mothers and fathers, undershepherds of the Good Shepherd.
- **#16b** We need to know God's story well and tell it often.

- **#16c** We need to remember God's faithfulness publicly and create intentional opportunities for remembering and responding together with the next generation. (In fact, this is one of the very purposes we gather to be the church in worship. So we need to be very careful to not always split everybody off into their own age group).
- **#16d** We need to remember that faith is not about knowledge, but about trust.

It doesn't matter if you know as much about the Bible as well as Wade Paschal. The issue is will you trust the Lord with your whole existence and with every part of your life?

In the same way, it doesn't matter whether this next generation knows everything about moral living and who God is – it WILL matter if they know Him...if they trust Him...if they will obey Him.

- **#17, #17a** Faith is about Him, not us. That is a comfort for those of us who have messed up. It is a guard from pride for those of us who think we have done well.
- **#17b** We need to be authentic.
- **#17c** We need to trust God with the next generation
- **#17d** We need to invest in their lives with integrity of heart and skillful hands.

Without a doubt, there are many in this congregation class who have answered already the call to be spiritual mothers and fathers for the next generation. Some of you have biological children. Some do not. Some of you have children still at home, others have children who are grown.

Some of you would say, by God's grace, it has gone well. Others would say, "*I have not fathered or mothered the next generation well at all.*" God's gracious answer is that this isn't about you or me – it's about Him. And He calls today to begin...or to begin again...and join Him at work.

Just tell His story. And be authentic.

Who you are matters in God's story, and what each of you have to offer the next generation is invaluable.

I want to say thank you to those who will for answering God's call...and I want to pray for you....