

Belief that brings confidence and hope

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in the Episcopal Parish of Saint John the Evangelist, Hingham, Massachusetts, on the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost and Father's Day, June 20, 2021.

See, now is the acceptable time, see, now is the day of salvation

2 Corinthians 6:2

The story of Job is one of hope and confidence in God's mercy and love. Because he lost his home, his cattle and his children, his well-meaning friends try to convince him that his troubles are the result of his sins. Even though the reality is that the innocent sometimes suffer and the wicked go unpunished, Job refuses to believe that a just God is punishing him. Despite the efforts of his family and friends to discourage him, Job is firm in his belief that he will be redeemed by a loving and merciful God.

Saint Mark's record of Jesus calming the disciples on the stormy sea reminds me of a similar experience as a young child. My father and my two brothers and I were out in a small boat in the middle of Lake George in New York when we suddenly found ourselves caught in the midst of a squall that turned into a terrific windstorm. My father was in the stern with the outboard motor, my brothers were in the middle and I was in the bow. We all held on tightly as our boat was tossed about by the high winds and waves. I clearly recall not being afraid. I was confident in the belief that my Dad knew how to handle a boat in a storm. If the boat was overturned and we were all thrown overboard, I remained confident in the belief that we would be safe.

As we emerge from the upheavals of the Covid pandemic and a nation more divided since the Civil War, I am certain that God is in our midst to lead us through these stormy times. In his book, *The Soul of America*, Jon Meacham encourages us to remember what our nation has endured. We have been through two world wars, the Great Depression, assassinations, political corruption and the ongoing struggle for the equality in civil rights for all citizens. He asserts that our nation will endure as we have endured as long as we do not give in to fear.

I commend those students who take a gap year before going on to college or graduate school to work in our urban areas at home or in underdeveloped countries abroad. Their experience enables them to gain an insight into who they are and what they want to do with their lives that will have meaning and purpose. They are confident in their belief that the experience will be valuable.

On this day we honor all fathers, including our own fathers, those who are still with us and those whom we see no longer. As a husband and father, I am confident that God was involved in bringing us together and in giving us the gift of children. Parenting is an act of faith based on love, understanding and common sense. We give our children room to grow and nourish them with what we believe was right and good and just. The rest is up to them.

As they grow and develop as individuals, we can't assume that they will accept all our values. That is the risk we take as they learn to think for themselves. We not only don't know what we are getting in our children, we don't know what we are discovering in ourselves. Life is full of surprises.

It is a bittersweet experience when they are ready and eager to set out on their own. At least it means we have done our job as parents, however imperfectly. After they are on their own, we can't take credit for their successes any more than we can accept blame for their failures.

It is a given that each generation thinks the previous generation is hopelessly out of touch. We have to meet the challenges of keeping up with all the advances in the age of technology. We had radio without Alexa and hifi but no wifi. Where once we were limited to a small black and white T.V. with three channels, we now enjoy a colorful giant HDTV screen on cable and multiple channels. It

wasn't that long ago when we had no calculators, computers, I pads, Internet, Google, E-mail, smart phones, facebook, texting, twitter or instagram; no CD's or GPS. At least the keyboard on the laptop remained the same as the old typewriter. For the most part, new technology has made life better for us.

Just as we asked our parents what kind of world they were handing on to us, I now wonder what kind of world we are handing on to our children. When the younger generation challenges our assumptions and questions nearly everything, it is a necessary part of their growth and development. Young people need the confidence to assert themselves, even though it may leave parents feeling as if they are the bone on which their children are cutting their teeth. Someone described that raising a teenager is like wrestling with an angel who keeps turning into a turkey buzzard! If we are honest, we were most likely the same with our own parents. The test of faith is to love our children unconditionally, especially when they make it difficult to like them.

I can't help but wonder what the world will be like in years beyond 2050. Will there finally be a cure for cancer? Will there be an end to racism and gun violence? Will we learn to settle international disputes without taking up arms and going to war? We can only imagine how computers might be linked to the human brain that will operate on thought waves transmitted over cyberspace. Future generations could be teleported everywhere at the push of a button. Whatever the future holds, each generation has to adapt to the on-going rapid pace of change. In our curiosity to explore the possibility of life on other planets, we must not neglect the quality of life on our own planet.

Statistics tell us that life expectancy in America is now about 78+ years for men and about 81+ years for women. The more curious statistic is that being married will add five years to a man's life span while marriage adds nothing to a woman's life span!

I like what Father Theodore Hesburgh, one time President of Notre Dame University, said about fathers: *The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.* We pass on to the next generation our sense of confidence and belief in a loving God and what we have learned about life. Then we need to listen as they express their questions, doubts, ideas and hopes. We are bound to make mistakes and we have to forgive ourselves as we hope that our children will forgive us. When it comes to instilling a sense of hope and confidence in how God is acting in their lives, the values that we model for them are ultimately the basis for establishing the kingdom of God on earth. We can only hope that each succeeding generation will pass on to the next a better, safer world than the one they inherited. Whether or not that becomes a reality is up to us.

No matter what stage we are in our lives, we never cease being their parents and they never cease being our children. It is all worth it when I answer the phone and hear, "Hi, Dad!"