

“More than Survival: A Father’s Job”

Sermon by Pastor Dan Harrison, Church of the Covenant 6/16/19

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; John 16:12-15

I had a unique opportunity this past Thursday to go on a bus trip to DC with my friends Rabbi John Nimon from Agudath Sholom and Pastor Martha Kearse from Peakland Baptist, and about 20 local educators. John had somehow snuck us on this particular trip free of charge, and Martha and I were grateful. The trip was sponsored by the Holocaust Education Foundation of Central Virginia; it provided teachers with workshops and a trip together to the National Holocaust Museum in DC, and that was the part we hitched a ride to. While there, we attended a couple of lectures and toured the museum. There was a new part of the museum recently opened which featured the Holocaust but with a unique play-by-play of the American perspectives at the time. What fascinated me most were these large well-lit 12x20 box signs that could rotate, so there would be information on one side and then more information on the other. The front of each of these maybe a dozen or so signs contained polling information of the American public conducted by the “National Opinion Research Center.” I found each one so interesting. I jotted a few down to share with you today.

The first ones were from 1938. One said, “Do you approve or disapprove of the Nazi treatment of Jews in Germany?” Then if you’d flip the sign over, and you’d read: “94% Disapproved.” You never know what the answer might be, and to be honest I wasn’t entirely sure... but relieved that a strong majority of our country did not support the violence against Jews by the Nazis in 1938. I went to another one, like a bear drawn to honey. It said, “It has been proposed that the government permit 10,000 refugee children from Germany to be brought into this country and taken care of in American homes. Do you favor this plan?” I was only slightly sweating this one; I mean they’re children, right? I flipped it over, and it said, “66% - No.” The next one said, “Should we allow a larger number of Jewish exiles from Germany into the United States to live?” If the children weren’t wanted, I couldn’t imagine the adults... I flipped it: “71% - No.” The next one I found was now from 1942. It said “Do you think we are doing the right thing in moving Japanese aliens (those who are not citizens) away from the Pacific coast?” [i.e. putting them into camps]. I flipped the sign box. “93% said Yes.” I was stunned. Next to it were stories of the “Concentration Camps” built for the Japanese Americans. I was speechless, and had to sit outside the exhibit alone for over an hour, processing what I had seen. I will give you a moment to process it as well.

I like what we read this morning from Proverbs: Wisdom personified. She preceded all of us and in the last line she says, “I took delight in all human beings.” ALL human beings—not one over another. There is value in understanding that God’s wisdom has been bequeathed to all. There is wisdom in all of us. As some of you may know, I have committed to help with the music at Camp Kum Ba Yah this summer, and this week was the first week. On Friday, just after my Thursday experience at the Holocaust Museum, hearing all of these children singing “All God’s critters got a place in the choir...” I was moved to tears. This is what we are about: Full acceptance of all people, all the time, everywhere, right?

After seeing the American Exhibit at the Museum and processing the information for a bit, we shuffled into a lecture where a Holocaust survivor shared his story. His name: Geroige Pick. Born in Hungary, and was a boy during the war. He survived occupied Hungary, but just barely. 130 of his relatives were killed,

most in Auschwitz. He was an only child, born in the early 30's. He and his parents lived in Budapest. As the laws of the country became more anti-Semitic to show their loyalty to their Nazi allies, their lives there changed drastically. His father, Istvan, lost his job and so did his mother. They were eventually forced out of their apartment and into crowded Jewish makeshift apartments. The dad, Istvan, was forced to work in labor camps, with occasional brief returns home. They began to starve; the Jews were without food and without means of getting it. Now, Jews were being sectioned off and many deported to the concentration camps and murdered. Istvan worked his way back to his family and found a place for them all to hide in an abandoned factory warehouse. So, there they hid, living in rubbish and squalor, but staying alive—avoiding execution. Eventually, the building was raided, however; Geroge was 10 by then. They were put into a ghetto where they would live till the end of the war. These were the “lucky” Jews still remaining after so many had already been sent to Auschwitz to die, and yet in the ghetto tens of thousands more would die of starvation and sickness. During their last hours there, Geroge recounted how they had all gone down into the basement of their building, hundreds there, crowded together to avoid the shelling by the Soviets—with nothing to eat. He was 11 now. Eventually the Soviets came, and they were free. However, Istvan and his wife could not even carry the belongings they have, because they had become too weak because, as Geroge, said, “They gave me every morsel of food that came into our possession, because I was their child.” Now, they were too weak to even stand. I will give us a moment to process that.

In John 16, Jesus says that the Spirit of Truth comes and will guide us to Truth. In fact, in John 4, Jesus tells the woman at the well that the Creator is seeking those who will worship in “spirit and in truth.” And here a few chapters later Jesus is explaining that the Spirit will guide people to Truth. He even says, “...she will guide you into all truth.” This is why we value the idea that there are many facets and mysteries surrounding truth. As people who seek ALL truth and understand that Wisdom delights itself in ALL people, then we honor ALL people. We do not place one above another. We do not place one religion above another. We are all on equally unique, individual inward and outward journeys where each is valued with the same measure. God draws all to a spiritual awakening where truths are revealed, unwrapped like gifts. These truths feed our light and fuel our love for one another. What truths has God revealed to you? What revelation has God shown you in your own life experience? The truth I share today is the story of what being a father is all about, giving all that you have. Geroge's father Istvan exemplified this. How he sought ways for them to stay alive, and they succeeded—barely, but it worked. He stayed alive in order to keep his family alive. At times we must brave this world alone in order to bring a light of hope to others. What is my truth? What revelation do I have? These are the questions we ask ourselves. I live for my family and I live for you. I live to see all grow in their faith and deeper into their love. Our inward and outward manifestations of our journeys is my mission. As we honor our fathers, whether figurative or literal, on this Father's day, may we honor one another—as we are all fathers to each other, fostering spiritual growth. Let us grow together as we grow deeper in our love for God and creation.

Shalom