

Congregational Church of the Messiah

May 18, 2008

“A Story to Tell”

Acts 5:27-42

Dr. David L. Gray

Good news is hard to contain.

In 1937, the doctor told a young woman that her son’s asthma “might stem from an allergy to chemical additives in commercially baked bread.” So being a good mother, she started baking her own.

First, she did a little homework...studying nutrition and holistic medicine.

Choosing all fresh ingredients, she started making her own whole-wheat bread, and her son seemed to get better. He improved enough that the doctor asked the mother to make whole-wheat bread for himself and his family. The word got around to the other patients, and they also asked for it.

At first, Mrs. Rudkin sold her breads to doctors through word of mouth and the mail. Soon she had to hire a neighbor to help her bake and expanded the kitchen into the garage and then the stable behind the house.

Before long, she was selling her fresh baked products wholesale. The way she did it was to walk into a market with bread, butter and a knife and give a taste to the owner. Her presentation always made the sale.

After two years, she was selling over twenty-five thousand loaves of bread a week...yet Mrs. Rudkin still insisted the dough be hand kneaded and the ingredients fresh. Hard work was expected and above average pay was provided...¹

By the time Maggie Rudkin sold her bakery, it had over thirty-two million dollars in annual sales... We know that bakery today. It is Pepperidge Farms.²

Good news can be shared. Hard work can be rewarded and be a blessings to many.

Pepperidge Farms continues to make quality baked goods today. I am sure each of us has enjoyed something from Pepperidge Farms. Pepperidge Farms baked the dinner rolls for the light lunch this noon.

The members of the Congregational Church of the Messiah have referred to their church as “the best kept secret in Westchester.” Even today, when I talk with persons in the community, they may ask, “Where is your church?”

¹ Roberts, Cokie. *We Are Our Mothers’ Daughters*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2000, page 180-181.

² *ibid*

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Landmarks around our location continue to change. We need to do a better job of telling the story of the Congregational Church of the Messiah to others, for many drive by each day and yet still seem unaware of the positive spiritual message we offer. Messiah could be the new, steady landmark on the west side of Lincoln. Spread the Good News. And here is one example of how to be really effective in getting people's attention.

Remember how Maggie Rudkin expanded her little baking experiment. When she was ready to share more bread, she started going into grocery stores and asking them to carry her bread. She took along fresh bread and butter and gave free samples of a healthy product. The grocers were convinced she had an excellent product, and she had a new store to sell her healthy breads. A good fresh sample of a healthy product draws persons to the product.

Each of us is meeting people all the time. Giving everyone whom we meet a sample of the spark of divine joy, which we have of God within our hearts, can be the first step in adding great joy and closer relationship with God for each person.

Laughter is good medicine. Sharing our faith, the inner joy that comes from our grateful hearts can be an immediate blessing to others. It can make a bad day good and a good day better. Sharing what we believe is most effective when it is done in joyful, positive actions—not self-righteous platitudes or a theological statement about what one believes.

The scripture this morning recounts the experience of Peter, James and John right after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Believing that somehow Jesus had been raised from the tomb, these faithful disciples had continued to tell about Jesus in public even though they had been ordered not to do so by the priests in Jerusalem under threats of beatings and being arrested and put in prison.

Finally, some 40 days after the Crucifixion, the Holy Spirit had come upon them and with renewed power and confidence they redoubled their teaching that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, who for hundreds of years the Prophets had been predicting would come to earth.

Jesus had healed the sick, made the lame walk, restored sight to the blind and taught that the kingdom of God was made *of love*—not hatred, *of kindness*—not power and military might.

Every person can have direct access to the Holy Spirit of God, and once a person has been filled with the Holy Spirit, there is no longer condemnation but salvation for that person's soul. That is the heart of the message we have the privilege to share:

Jesus showed us what our Heavenly Father is like in the story of the prodigal son and the loving father. (Luke 15:11-32)

In letting of children come to Him and forbidding not them, “for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matthew 19:14)

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In telling us that “Except as you become as little children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

In so many other parables, beatitudes and stories, Jesus healed and blessed others showing us the kindness and power of our Heavenly Father.

God works through us to reach others with Good News of His forgiveness, acceptance and challenge. God has placed part of His Divine Spirit within each human and a will with the capacity to choose how we will apply the life we have been given. We may choose to go our own way or to follow God’s guiding hand.

The disciples chose not to surrender to the easy way out and please the powerful priests who ordered them not to talk to anyone about Jesus. Instead, the disciples remained true to the Holy Spirit God they received from God at Pentecost. Once filled with God’s Spirit, there was no weakening or turning back. They knew they were representatives of Christ, God making His appeal to others as they told the experience of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the coming of the Holy Spirit of God into the world in their own lives.

God created us whole persons with unique and important parts. With every part working together, we are able to realize the full potential God has placed within us. Sometimes we need to keep going toward meeting a need even when we cannot see where God is leading us.

When Mrs. Rudkin learned of a need for her son to live a fuller life, she created a way to help him and learned how to make it available to help others live a fuller, healthier life. By giving others a fresh sample, a taste that was good and keeping the quality high, she offered healthy life for many more people than just her son.

God has placed a wonderful seed of His Divine Spirit within us. God expects us to share this good news with others in whatever way we can. It may be through baking fresh bread and sharing it with a neighbor. Maybe it is through sending a note or making a cheerful phone call. Maybe it is through deep, concentrated, prayer focused on a dear friend in need.

We do not dictate or determine the limitless ways God chooses to use the power of earnest prayer. God knows what is needed far more than we do. We underestimate God when we even think God’s knowledge is limited to what we know. And talk about how many resources are at God’s command. When we pray we are dealing with a Source of literally unlimited Power—not some temporary international human corporation with global outreach, Swiss gold reserves, and credit in the World Bank. Nor are we talking about power to build great pyramids or create islands in the sea as in Saudi Arabia or cut off the tops of mountains and level them to build houses as in California.

I refer to the power of deep inner spiritual prayer as our spirit opens the Divine Holy Spirit of God within us. We can connect with the Spirit of our Loving Heavenly Father. God has far more power, knowledge and resources than anything we can imagine at His command

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ready to be released and to help us become the persons God created us to be.

Jesus planted the seeds of love and hope, of peace and belief within us just as God did in the hearts and minds of Jesus' disciples and hundreds of ordinary persons whose lives He touched.

The Spirit of God in Christ continues to grow in the hearts and minds of persons today in whom the seeds planted by the prophets, given expression in Jesus and returning as the Holy Spirit upon all the disciples in the Upper Room and down through the ages.

Often Christians have put their faith to music. Sometimes when we sing hymns, we do not take the time to really think about the meaning of the words. Listen to the words of the "Hymn of Promise" in the context of the story we have to share with the world.

"In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise, butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter, there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

"There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

"In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see."³

God can see us offer ourselves as His "fresh-every-day" people who can let His light shine through us for we know that

"Yesterday is history—we cannot change it.
Tomorrow is mystery—it has not arrived yet.
Today is a gift from God."⁴

Christians tell the world of Christ being born at Christmas—God coming to us as the Messiah with Good News to all the world—a Savior has been born.

From the top of this hill in Westchester, California, let us proclaim the God's Good News.

Amen.

³ *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship*, #707. Fifth Printing, 1990. Nashville, TN.

⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt