

This sermon was given by Pastor Joel on the Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 9, 2013. It is entitled "Pass It On!" and is based on the readings from 1 Kings 17:8-24 and Luke 7:11-17, as well as impressions he received while attending the Maine Conference UCC Annual Meeting in Farmington, May 31-June 1.

At our Maine Conference Annual Meeting last week, my attention was caught by a number of things that seemed to speak to me. They spoke about the idea of passing what we have onto others, onto the next generation. The theme for the meeting was *"Moving Forward in the Midst of Change"* and so these things that were said were not merely coincidental. There was purpose in their being said but for some reason they seemed to hit me deep inside as if there was some special message I was to gain from them.

The first was an image shared with us by Rev. Darren Morgan, Associate Conference Minister for Small Church Development. Darren spoke about a trip to the Holy Land that he recently took. He spoke about being in Amman, Jordan and seeing a lot of housing construction. He went on to describe something he finally had to ask their tour guide about. He noticed on many of the homes, homes that were already finished and had people living in them, that on the corners of their flat roof tops were these columns of concrete and steel re-bar sticking up. They gave the impression that more work was to be done on the home but it was obvious that the homes were already done and being occupied. He learned that these columns had a special name. They were called by a word that meant, "pillars of hope." And that they were put there purposefully for the next generation to build upon the top of the existing home. So when the son or a daughter and their new spouse were ready, they could simply add-on to the family's existing structure. A place had been made ready, prepared for the next generation. "Pillars of hope."

The next story came from Rev. Bryan Breault, Director of Outdoor Ministries. Bryan spoke about a time in his first year at Pilgrim Lodge, our Maine Conference UCC camp. It was one of those days when nothing was going right, he was in a terrible mood and he listed a whole bunch of things that had happened and that he had to take care of and he was walking down the boardwalk in front of the cabins, on his way to take care of some stupid problem, when he suddenly heard a wee small voice speak to him as he was striding by, a little boy sitting on the bench along the boardwalk, just out of the blue said to him, *"I like chapel because we get to sing new songs."* It took Bryan a step or two to realize someone had spoken to him and as he stopped and turned to the boy, and asked *"What?"* he heard those words again, *"I like chapel because we get to sing new songs."* Bryan said, something like *"Oh, good."* and then went on his way. But his day changed completely at that point as he was reminded again what it is that Pilgrim Lodge, and his work there is all about. It is about providing a place, a holy place for children and all ages to come and find joy in the simple things, like learning new songs. It is a place where we help prepare and provide for the coming generation.

The third thing came from Rev. Anne Roundy who spoke as Chair person of the Pilgrim Lodge Capital Campaign. Yes, if you don't know it yet, the Conference is trying to raise \$750,000 to match an existing \$750,000 gained from the sale of Rockcraft, to rebuild the camp boardwalk and do other needed repairs and expansions at the camp. And our Hancock-Waldo Association was the first to offer a donation of \$1,000 toward this goal!

So Anne, good teacher and song leader that she is, taught us some new words to an old camp song. It is the song we will sing together in just a few minutes, and the name of it is the name of the capital campaign, "*Pass It On.*"

It goes like this: "*It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing. That's how it is with Pilgrim Lodge, once you've experienced it. It's time to give, we love PL, we want to pass it on!*"

The sentiment is clear. We have this gift, this wonderful camp that was purchased 57 years ago, that has been enjoyed and cherished by so many from our churches over these years. Let's take care of it so it lasts for many more years to come, for future generations.

In our readings for today we have two stories about the death of a son. Both are the only children, the only sons, of widows. So it is a loss of keen importance for in the ancient world a household without a male presence was a household in distress, without power, a household that could not sustain itself.

In both of these stories God intercedes. In the first, Elijah cries out to God with cries of anguish, asking God to return the life to the son, to restore this family, this family that God had sent him to, to begin with, and who had cared for him, sustained him all these days. God hears the cries of the prophet and restores the son's life. Which means, even more important than the miracle of the never failing oil and meal in the jar, the family is again given hope, hope for another generation and hope in the God of the prophet Elijah.

In our gospel reading, Luke's hearers would have very likely recalled that story from their Hebrew scriptures when they heard this

story about Jesus restoring life to the dead son of the widow of Nain. But Luke tells us a story that is not only about the ability of Jesus to be like the prophet Elijah of old to call upon the power of God, but that the power of God resides within him. And not only the power but the compassion of God. When Luke tells of Jesus' response to seeing the woman in her distress at the loss of her son, he tells us that Jesus had "compassion for her." He uses the same word, in Greek "*splanchnizomai*" that he uses when he tells of the compassion of the Good Samaritan who rescues the injured man along the way, and when he tells of the compassion of the loving Father as he sees his Prodigal Son return to him. It is a compassion that is steadfast, never failing, that is deep and wide, that sees the pain and suffering of another and is motivated, that longs to reach out and do something to alleviate that suffering.

The word in Greek literally means either, "*a churning of the entrails*", or "*a turning of the womb.*" This is a compassion that reaches down into the gut, that stirs the inner life, the deepest emotions within us. Think of how you responded to the killings of children at Newtown or any of the tragic shootings of recent years, or of any time you've been brought to tears when you heard of loss of young, innocent life and thought of the pain and indescribable suffering of those parents, those family members. That is the compassion we are talking about here. That is the compassion of Christ. It is a compassion that sees, that knows and loves the other as one from the same womb, as a sibling, someone we are closely and intimately related to.

In her book, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity*, Dorothee Soelle tells a story of a rabbi who asked his students how they can recognize the

moment when night ends and day begins.

"Is it when, from a great distance, you can tell a dog from a sheep?" one student asked.

"No," said the rabbi.

"Is it when, from a great distance, you can tell a date palm from a fig tree?" another student asked.

"No," said the rabbi.

"Then when is it?" the students asked.

"It is when you look into the face of any human creature and see your brother or your sister there. Until then, night is with us."

If we are concerned about the coming generation, if we want to prepare our "pillars of hope" for them, then we must do the things that support and celebrate them. Like supporting our Pilgrim Lodge Camp and donating money for camp scholarships for our kids. Like going to graduations and telling our youth that we believe in them and that we really have hope and trust in them and that we

have so much we want to pass on to them.

And it is not just about our young people. It is also about caring for our elderly. It is about visiting them and letting them know that they are loved, that they are not forgotten and that they are respected for all they have passed on to us.

But mostly, it is about showing our compassion, just as Jesus did. A deep compassion that sees all as brothers and sisters, as those who share the same womb, who come from the same Mother and Father of us all. A compassion that binds us one to another and moves us to reach out to one another in our pain and suffering. This is the compassion we need to pass on to our young people, to share with our elders, and it is the compassion we need to encourage within one another. It is the compassion of Christ. Amen.