

Father's Day/2nd Sunday after Pentecost/11th Sunday in Ordinary Time/June 18, 2017

Psalm 100; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8;

Rev. Joel M. Krueger

"Persons of Character"

I love this time of year, when the birds are busy with their families. They've built their nests, and we have had a number of nests that were built in our yard this year. Kate and I both got to see and take pictures of a Robins nest with 4 blue eggs in our Juniper bush next to our driveway. In that same bush, were Song Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows. The Catbirds were in the Forsythia and we almost had some Tree Swallows in a bird house I put up this year. The Cardinals, Nuthatches (both Red Breasted and White Breasted), Gold Finches, House Finches, Purple Finches, Red-Wing Blackbirds, Grackles, Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, Crows, Titmice, Chickadees, and Hummingbirds, who come and feed in our yard, must also be nesting nearby. Oh, and of course, the Starlings, who this year found a space to get into our garage soffit, are nesting there.

At this point, most of the baby birds from the first brood are out of the nest and are being cared for by their parents. They are learning how to become whatever kind of bird they are. They are learning what food to eat and where to find it. They are learning how to fly and where to go when there is danger. They are learning all the things they will need to know in order to live and survive in the world.

In order for baby birds to learn from their parents, they have to know who their parents are, and so a really neat phenomenon occurs in birds which is called *"filial imprinting."* In *precocial birds*, (birds that are born alert, with downy feathers and that can leave the nest soon after hatching, like ducks and geese and swans), imprinting occurs within the first day, even within the first hour or two after hatching. Studies have shown that baby ducks and geese will imprint on the first large moving object that they see. Generally, it goes well and the one they imprint on is one of their parents. But occasionally it goes awry. One instance is of a grouse who happened to imprint on a passing farm tractor and ended up following the tractor around the fields, and later, even doing courtship displays in front of it! (from The Spruce online magazine).

With altricial birds (those that are born naked, blind and basically helpless in the nest, like most songbirds), the process of imprinting takes longer and is not as strong. It may include the sense of hearing, listening to the voice of the parents, and may continue to later stages of development. So as I watch the birds out in my backyard, I imagine that they have imprinted with their parents, and have developed a close bond, an attachment that leads them to follow their parents, imitate them, and take on the behaviors that make them the kind of bird that they are. To me, that is an amazing thing to be able to watch and behold!

As I read our gospel passage for today from Matthew, I had a sense that a similar kind of thing was happening with Jesus and his disciples. Certainly, we can't call the attachment the disciples had with Jesus, "imprinting." However, they had made the choice to follow him, to be his disciples. They chose him to be their master, their teacher, their model. And he then chose 12 of them, the "apostles", and instructed them to go out to the surrounding towns and villages. He gave them authority over the unclean spirits, *"to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity."* He said to them, *"And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."*

These are the very things that he had been doing. Basically everything he had done, except "teaching." And that would come later, at Pentecost as then they would know enough and be empowered to take on that task, as Peter did as he spoke to the crowds gathered there around that house in Jerusalem. And as they would then continue to do in the Temple, lead by the Spirit of Jesus, to teach and lead people to the Way of Christ.

But for now, they are like little fledgling birds, just learning to test their wings, learning the basics of what it means to be one of his, one like him. They are now learning to take on some of his character. They have followed him, watched him, prayed with him, have listened to him and asked questions of him. They have experienced much with him and have learned from him. They have witnessed his compassion. And it is his compassion, above all else, his compassion and his love, that will form the character of what they will become.

On this Father's Day, I am reminded of my father, who died last year, and the character that he possessed, and how he passed some of that onto me and my siblings. One might say, my Dad was a man of character. He certainly had a position in our family as head of the household. Though Mom may have often had the last word or made the actual decisions, Dad was the one in whom the power seemed to reside. I can remember more than a few times when after reaching the point of frustration with me or my brothers, Mom would say, *"Just wait until your father gets home!"* And in our extended family, with our aunts and uncles and cousins, he was seen as the person to go to if you had problems, especially the kind involving the law, as Dad was a policeman, the Juvenile Officer for our city police department.

He was respected at his place of work, in his community, at church, and by all kinds of people. One of my favorite memories that I share with my brother Scott, is of walking with Dad, whether downtown or anywhere, everyone seemed to know him. They would greet him, *"Hi Fritz!"* and he would greet them back with a smile and a happy *"Hi!"* right back. And we would always ask, *"Dad, who was that?"* and he would tell us, *"Oh, that was so and so, someone I know from work - or whatever it might be."* Although just as often, he couldn't remember who the person might be!

When I think of my father's character, there are some words that come to mind: friendly, kind, optimistic, polite (like opening doors for others), committed and dedicated, trustworthy, appreciative of the simple pleasures (like watching the birds and fishing with a worm and bobber), self-giving, faithful (to God and to family), sentimental, and loving (he had a deep love and respect for Mom). I saw these things expressed in my father's life and many of those are imprinted into me.

Think about what words express the kind of character your father, or someone who served as a parent figure for you, exhibited for you and your family? What things have you taken on, have chosen to make as part of who you are as a person? We know that not everyone's experiences are the same, not all of our experiences with our parents have been healthy or helpful, but hopefully, we all have had someone in our lives who has been a good role model, has helped us find our way into adulthood and has helped us become the person we desire to be.

Our fathers, our parents, those who have raised us, have had a primary impact upon our lives and upon who we are. And each person around us can have an impact on who we become over time. Through his compassion and love, Jesus helped forge the lives of each of his

apostles. And Paul, in his words that we heard today, tells us that through the grace, peace and faith we know in God, even the hard times in life, even the trials and tribulations can lead us to a better place, as he says, *"but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."*

That "love" has come to us through those whose lives have been filled with a character of compassion. Let the compassion of Christ, fill our hearts now and forevermore. Amen.