



Ubuntu (We Are One)

John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

May 3, 2015

Thought for the Week

A Young Mother Talks about Her Autistic Child

The other day we had a few girls from the neighborhood over. I was sitting, having a cup of coffee and talking to my best friend, who happens to be the mother of one of the girls. I heard another little girl ask my best friend's child, "What is wrong with Gabby?"

This is a moment that usually causes me to cringe because even though the girls are just playing in my living room with toys and watching a Disney movie on TV, this one's already figured out that my daughter is different. Without any meltdowns or tantrums, this new 5-year-old child has caught on to my daughter's disability.

I hold my breath and wait to hear her response. My best friend's daughter, also five years old, smiles and says, "Well Gabby has autism, and that's what makes her special. She lives in a world that is different than ours...kind of like her brain does not work the same way."

The other little girl says, "Is that why she is weird?"

My best friend's daughter laughs and says, "She is not weird; she just likes to play 'make believe' a lot, and she really likes horses. You just have to play the things she wants to play, and if she gets rough you have to tell her mom. She doesn't like scary movies, and she cries a lot some days, but her mom is the only mom in the neighborhood who will let everyone come inside, and she always serves snacks and drinks. Just give her some time and you will see the real her."



Their conversation only lasted a minute, but what I learned in that minute is other children can accept my child, but they will not be fooled. They know pretty soon after meeting Gabby that she's unique. I've never been secretive about Gabby's disabilities though I often speak about the challenges and triumphs of our little girl to others.

My child stands out from the bunch; she probably always will, but listening to this little girl's definition of autism and then having them play with Gabby lets me know she will continue to spread awareness. When she runs into another boy or girl in school, they will understand a little better what autism is. It's not something to be scared of. "Autistic" does not mean they can't be friends. It just mean an individual is unique but wants to play, just like every other child. A

little patience and understanding is required.

This little girl took the facts a friend shared with her and played for the rest of the afternoon with my little girl. She ended up having a great time playing horses. Not all days go like this; some days my child is upset with the other little girls, and we have to close our door and send everyone home. But today we made a new friend, and the girls got to play inside on a cold day. My child got to experience normal play with a group of girls, and that is always my goal.

Despite Gabby being different, I'm firmly committed to her being part of our community. I drag her to Sunday school, even though she doesn't make it in the class very long. Other children are exposed to her for a short while, and that's important for her and them. One in 68 children are affected with autism today; my child may be the first autistic child these kindergarteners get to know, but she won't be the last.

When dark clouds appear above my head and life with a special needs child gets me down, I force myself to push away the darkness and live in the light. I remember we need to go out — not for Gabby or me — but for all the other little children struggling with autism. I hear much too often moms of children with autism saying, "It's not worth the hassle to take her to the fair." I would agree with them on that statement; it would be easier to keep the doors closed and let Gabby play by herself. That's where she's most comfortable, and no outside influences will push her outside of her comfort zone. But if any child needs to be pushed, it's an autistic child. I cannot keep her in a perfect bubble or world for long. As much as I would like to keep my child safe and have no one question or make fun of her, that's not reality. So I push her to events in our community, church and school, not because my child enjoys those events so much, but because we're going for the autistic children coming after us. Just like the parents before us who pushed their children into our communities, we must continue to do the same.

We have to keep going, pushing and being seen. We have to keep having conversations with strangers and our children's friends about autism. Putting my daughter out in the world, making her uncomfortable is the only way I can make social interaction easier for her and others around her. *Practice makes perfect!* So practice we shall.

Prayer Thought for the Week

God, we offer humble praise for your promise of peace that brings hope to the hopeless and joy to the joyless.

God, we recognize our need for your peace in our lives. Forgive our shortcomings and guide us as we accept the responsibility of sharing your peace with others.

We uphold for your blessing of peace the people of Cape Verde. We seek your blessing of wholeness and healing for all people who struggle through difficult living conditions. Open our eyes to the needs of those in our own communities and in our world, who suffer from the injustice of hunger and poverty. Grant us the courage and compassion to reach out with loving hands and generous hearts wherever there is need.

Thank you, God, for hope in knowing your promise of peace is born over and again in the hearts of all who receive your generous and wonderful gift.

Hear our collective prayers, God of peace, that your peace may become the peace of this world. Amen.

Stewardship Thoughts

Stewardship, in its simplest form, is the practice of generosity. It is essential to the daily expression of our faith. As a church that is energized by lively engagement in our faith and life, we know that understanding personal and household stewardship is crucial in responding to God's abundant grace.

Each of us has a unique story, and we are part of a larger story that makes up the Community of Christ. In the Road to Emmaus story, it is at the household table where Christ is revealed and recognized, where hearts are warmed for greater sharing and generosity. Recognizing God's story in our own story shapes our lives, identity and choices. When we join with other individuals and households in making daily decisions rooted in the stories of our loving and benevolent God, the result is our increased capacity to give generously and boldly participate in what God is up to in the world.

The Plymouth congregation has the opportunity to be a voice that teaches some very different ideas about time, talent and treasure. The practice of generosity takes the support of an entire faith community, conversation between individuals in all generations and a focus on households.

Living generously begins with the involvement of children and continues through every age and stage of life. The many resources offered by our Community of Christ, support congregations in equipping households and individuals in becoming faith-filled, lifelong stewards.