



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Weaving A New World

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

December 30, 2012

There's a lovely legend about the Holy Family and a spider. It's actually a little out of order with our lessons, but I'm taking some license. It happens after the visit of the astrologers from the east. Before finding Jesus, they had stopped by to see King Herod apparently some sort of protocol thing. Herod was rather wickedly interested in the existence of a child so powerful as to be spoken about in the stars and under the ruse of wanting to go and pay his respects as well, asked the out of towners to let him know just where this child could be found. Something must not have seemed quite kosher to the wise men and so they headed home without stopping by Herod's place again. At some point, Herod figures that he's been thwarted and so he sent his thugs to take care of the situation, in characteristically brutal fashion. What he wasn't counting on was the cosmic warning system that let Joseph know of the danger. His disturbing dream convinced him to quickly pack up his wife and the new baby and head to Egypt. Here's where the legend begins.

Apparently, some of Herod's henchmen got wind of a family getting out of town ahead of their murderous visit and so they begin their pursuit. The little family traveled on, as fast as they could with an infant. Joseph may have been aware that they were being followed and so he was careful to try to keep them under cover, especially at night. On one particular night, Joseph looked for a safe place to spend the night and he found a cave just off of the path that they were following. He investigated it for cave-dwelling critters and then led the trusty donkey in and settled Mary and Jesus deep in the recesses of the cave. They all slept. What they did not know was that on that night, a tiny bit of creation worked feverishly to protect them. A spider immediately went to work spinning an elaborate web across the entrance of the cave. Hours later, Herod's men, sure that their prey was nearby were carefully checking all possible hiding places along the path. As one of them approached the cave, prepared to investigate, another stopped him, pointed to the spider web and said – "don't bother – no one could have gone in there without breaking that web" And so they moved on. The exhausted spider had woven her web so well that she had saved Holy Family who made it safely to their destination in Egypt, never knowing to whom they owed their lives.

On this day, we hear about the Word that dwelt among us – God's ideas expressed through a human life, from vulnerable infancy through suffering servanthood and to self-sacrificing love. And we welcome a new child into the midst of this 2000 year old drama. What words will we weave around him?

First of all love. His family loves him and will always love him. Love will be his launching pad, sending him out into the world. But we, the church community chosen for him, have another love to wrap around him, the knowledge of God that is love. We will weave stories of Jesus into a tapestry of mystery, courage, and love. And we will teach him that love is stronger than anything that the world will show him. It is stronger than fear, hatred and despair. We will also help him to know that he is worthy of love and his worth does not depend on success or perfection or accomplishment. Love and acceptance are his birthright. The Word that became human and walked with us is love.

From the very beginning, all that was created through the Word unfolded through the dynamics of balance. Creation always seeks balance. In human culture that balance is called justice and it is the desire of God that we seek and learn how to create justice for all. It is a word that we will weave into the web for Clayton. It starts with helping him know that not everyone is

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as fortunate as he is; that those who are poor and outcast are also worthy of God's love, and that we have a responsibility to them. When there is no justice, we as God's people are called to care and to try to put things right. We will not jump into discussion of income inequality and oppression before he is ready but we will weave justice into his experiences here in Sunday School, by telling the stories of those who are without and helping him to think through why that is so. Trinity will model for him what it looks like to make a difference in the world.

Compassion will be a strong thread in this web. When we show him the tapestry of Jesus' life we will point out how compassion holds the whole thing together. It links love and justice. It knits his heart to every other heart. Godly Play, our excellent Sunday school program, gives children the time to wonder, to step into a story and consider what might happen, what someone might feel. In the wondering, compassion is born. The word actually means "to suffer with", to step into another's shoes and feel their experience. Without compassion, nothing will change in the world for where there is no sense of another's struggle and pain, there is no motivation to involve one's self. Children must be taught the difference between an existence that is focused on the self and one that is directed towards the other. Children have the capacity but it must be nurtured. The church must stand strong against the worldly winds of individualism and apathy. Here we practice compassion and children learn by seeing how well we care about others. He will keep us on our toes.

So we have a glistening web of love, justice and compassion. But the world has been known to tear such things apart, hacking away with weapons and careless disregard for its beauty. If you've ever seen a spider web buffeted by strong winds you know how strong and resilient it is. That is because in every place that strands intersect there is something that is greater than the two strands individually. Hope emerges out of the strength of the web. A community is always able to do more and withstand more than anyone trying to go it alone. Look at the community of Newtown. They appear to be aware that it is only in their sense of belonging to one another that they will survive. When one is weak, there is one nearby who is strong. They will hold each other together. Hope is the trust in something greater. Embracing hope means that we give ourselves over to our place in the unfolding of God's story. We can rest in the comfort of knowing that we never have to save the world by ourselves. We can allow ourselves times of weakness and failure without being shamed by them. When God's people get it right, we are there for each other, always moving forward together. We pick up the ones who stumble, give thanks for a helping hand, and celebrate the ones who bravely lead for a time. Hope tells us that strength and inspiration will come when we need them.

This web of living words that we begin today for and with Clayton is beautiful. It is the template for a redeemed world, a world imagined from the very beginning.

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