

Because of You
Reunion Sunday
May 7, 2023
Rev. Sarah Campbell

I know. I know. These stories are told repeatedly from this pulpit. But for good reason! Not only to share with newer comers who we are but also to remind long timers who we are. It's like family lore. And we come by this honestly, telling the same stories over and over again. Reminding us who we are.

And so, this reunion Sunday, let's remember who we are. And of course, this community through the years, contains multitudes of stories. Nobody knows them all. But here are some highlights:

- In this place, all are welcome. Truly all are welcome.
- Mayflower is deeply intergenerational. Witness today: jazz for Jesus and the adult choir.
- We've created a beloved intergenerational collective—our school of the heart, otherwise known as our faith formation program.
- We are unafraid. We go right into conversations often considered taboo, discovering that they are sacred conversations, about human sexuality, death, addiction, and the most taboo of all, money.
- We are non-creedal, a safe space for questions and doubts.
- At the same time, we are intensely on the Jesus path, the practices of the faith, like doing justice and accompanying the immigrant
- We are a befriending, listening people, so many of us having been trained as a Befriender
- We work hard at staying healthy as a community, in our conversations and communication ways.
- We are a profoundly spiritual collective, with songs and contemplative practices woven all through our life together.
- We are an organizing or activist church, using our collective power to bring about the reign of God on earth.
- We are often a groundbreaking or early adopter church—like with women in leadership and open and affirming and Creekside and solar.

-We are intense.

And it's largely because of you, long timers that this church is the way it is. WE blame it on you. 😊 How good and right to remember who we are, this remarkable legacy, as we head into our 100-year anniversary soon and as we wonder at who we want to become in the next 100 years.

Because of you....

But why are you the way you are long timers? And go back another 50 years and wonder why were the ancestors who started Mayflower the way they were? Yes, because of the Holy Spirit, and the Bible stories, but there is more that is uniquely American....

Let's do some wondering about this, this morning about the immigrant, predominately white American church. (The story of the black church is very different, a powerful story for someone to tell another day...)

Alexis De Toqueville, remember him from high school history class?, was a Frenchman sent to America in 1831 to study our prison system. But he ended up studying so much more. An anthropologist, he was, who observed and took massive notes while in America. It felt so different to him coming from a land of well-defined classes- feudal, royal, rigidly classed- where everyone knew their place and it was just the way things were, like night and day and summer and winter. He was stunned by what he saw in his travels across the US and out of this came the book Democracy In America.

(I finally read this book while on sabbatical but have been slow to include it in sermons because of what is missing from his reflections, about the indigenous people and about the enslaved people brought to this land. This is also foundational to our national story. But I trust that we can all handle, in our intellects and our hearts, the complexity of history. No erasure. No oversimplification. We seek whole sight.)

No sooner do you set foot upon American ground, than you are stunned by a kind of tumult; a confused clamor is heard on every side; and a thousand simultaneous voices demand the satisfaction of their social wants. Everything is in motion around you; here, the people of one quarter of a town are met to decide upon the building of a church; there, the election of a representative is going on; a little farther, the delegates of a district are posting to the town in order to consult upon some local improvements; in another place the laborer's of a village quit their ploughs to deliberate upon the project of a road or a public school.

The same spirit pervades every act of social life. If a stoppage occurs in a thoroughfare, and the circulation of vehicles is hindered, the neighbors immediately form themselves into a deliberative body; and this extemporaneous assembly ... remedies the inconvenience.... If some public pleasure is concerned, an association is formed to give more splendor and regularity to

the entertainment. IN the United States associations are established to promote the public safety, commerce, industry, morality, and religion. There is no end which the human will despairs of attaining through the combined power of individuals united into a society.

In some countries, he writes... people set too high a value upon their time to spend it on the interests of the community. But if an American were condemned to confine his activity to his own affairs, he would be robbed of one half of his existence; he would feel an immense void in the life... and his wretchedness would be unbearable. These are the habits which freedom has formed in this land. (de Toqueville)

De Tocqueville was blown away by the number and variety of voluntary associations in America and of how people, completely free of the feudal mindset, (with no land owners or upper class telling them what to think and how to behave) just gather together and say: what shall we do? And do it! How this empowering mindset came to these immigrants, often emigrating they were from places that starved them of any empowerment, as they took the ship across the ocean, is a kind of miracle. (Quite the opposite of the enslaving mindset forced upon other human beings held captive in the hold of the ship, while crossing the ocean from Africa.)

Two other things de Tocqueville lifted up as essential to the American spirit, as a kind of three legged stool, all three features are needed for this to work. 1. voluntary associations sprouting up everywhere and 2. every community had a local newspaper, and 3 there was no concentration of wealth. .. according to De Tocqueville... maybe in comparison to European countries?...In America, he writes “The wealthy are few and powerless”.

De Tocqueville’s analysis missed a lot, maybe worse, missed the most important, the original sin of racism, but the observations that he filled his journal with every night before going to sleep, about the American Spirit, albeit largely white immigrant, and the sprouting and spreading of voluntary associations, like prairie grass, across the country is also an important part of our story.

And somehow, reading Acts, the stories about the sprouting and spreading of early churches across the Mediterranean, can remind one of de Tocqueville’s description of voluntary associations sprouting and spreading across America. Even though one story, the story in Acts was written 80 years after the events and the other is a firsthand account, both speak of an energy and power that brings people together, with goodness at the heart, and how they, communally, create something that has never been before.

Lucinda Williams sings: "You took my joy. I want it back."

Covid, you took our church. We want it back.

Covid disrupted everything, our children's lives, the arts, churches and synagogues and mosques, our work lives. We still curse you Covid. The effects linger and in some ways are only becoming clearer. So much energy went into just surviving for two plus years. Now we're more clearly seeing the damage done.

Covid gave birth to some helpful tools of connection, to be sure. Especially for those who are not able to gather in person. And there's some great convenience too. But the most vital, voluntary associations need in person, skin in the game presence. As our nation's top doctor said last week about the epidemic of loneliness: "There's really no substitute for in-person interaction."

We want the church that's been growing slowly but surely the last many years back. We want especially our beloved inner generational school for the heart back. We know it will be different now, transformed creatively. And we want that. We want to keep growing our congregation and our income and so our mission as we have been ever so gradually growing the last many years.

But it's more than that, more than just wanting to keep our church secure and growing.

A couple weeks back our preacher, the prophet Jim Antal, used the "E" word from this pulpit in this liberal, progressive church. "Evangelize" he practically commanded us. He sent us out to be evangelists, to let people know about his church, Mayflower. Invite friends. Don't be embarrassed. It will be a gift to them.

Now today I'm going to be so bold as to use this "S" word from this pulpit. Remember the first sentence in today's scripture:

Peter exhorted them saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

So, Peter talks about a corrupt generation. Not sure what the corruptions of his time were. Not sure of the corruptions of our time. Undoubtedly we all have different opinions about today's corruptions that we can explore together in the future...

But what we are certain of is that our neighbors are hurting, hurting bad, and they need salvation from their suffering. We know that there is an epidemic of loneliness, despair, and meaninglessness among our beloved neighbors.

And we know that there is salvation here... or in the synagogue, mosque, temple or church across town. Yes salvation, though we are always imperfect because of our impossible high ideals, but salvation nonetheless. Salvation because of what we believe. And at the times of life when you or I find this hard to believe, we pray to God to help us in our unbelief and we choose to stay in the midst of people who do believe and who pray this with one breath and who sing this with one voice... What we believe saves us, every day of our life, until our last breath. This is what we believe:

“We believe that Love is the most powerful force on earth.”

I quote the prophet Antal. “Motivated by love, each of us can make profound, fundamental changes in what we do with the one precious life we have been given.”

Thank you founders of Mayflower almost 100 years ago. Thank you, long time members, for sustaining this church for its ultimate purpose of love. We promise you that we will do everything we can to keep love at the center of the next 100 years, always wondering together what is the best way to love in this place and time; lovingly but truthfully examining all of our past including the democratic immigrant vitalism de Tocqueville experienced and the original sin of racism he chose not to see, all of our past and set forth a new vision for the next 100 years in service to one thing, love.

We believe that love is the most powerful force on earth.

God is love.

Day by day, they spent much time together... praising God, and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day God added to their number those who were being saved. Acts

Sources

De Tocqueville, Alexis, Democracy in America, Washington Square Press, 1964.

Seitz, Amanda, “Top doctor says loneliness is public health epidemic”, Start Tribune, May 3, 2023.

