

Arvada
United Methodist Church

January 25, 2009

The Church Weighs In: Education

Rev. Rusty Butler

Luke 2: 41-52

As I began preparing for the sermon this morning, I was struck by the fact that in the Bible, there are only five references to education and they all come in the books of the Apocrypha. Oh man what have I gotten myself into?

But then I looked up Teacher and teaches and there are over 250 references to that. And another 75 uses of the words learned and learning. I thought well there is some room here.

Listen to the words of Sirach...Chapter 21:12 ff.

To a sensible person education is like a golden ornament and like a bracelet on the right arm.

I had to go to the dictionary and get a definition of what education is. There were several definitions. The first is the imparting and acquiring of knowledge through teaching and learning, especially at a school or similar institution. And the second definition was an informative experience.

Let's take that second definition first. I think we are always in the process of being educated if we are open to it. Don't you?

In my first couple of years of high school, I had a part time job in the summer and after school. I worked for a drive in restaurant, called the Corral drive-in. I worked my way from backroom helper, to grill fryer, finally to bun boy. That was the top of the heap. I was a sophomore. 15 years old. Somehow, I was elected in the spring of that year, to be a waiter for the Junior/Senior prom. That was an honor. The interesting thing was that there was a tradition that the Sophomore's would do a dance during the pre prom meal for the upper classman. I was paired with Kathy Conway. She was about six foot tall and later became a model living in New York City. She was pretty and nice. I was about 5 ft 6. Had pimples and two cowlicks, and just well just like any sophomore boy I guess.

For about four weeks before the prom, we were supposed to learn a dance to a song called Nights in White Satin by the Moody Blues. We dressed in black tights and white satin dresses, that came down to about mid thigh.

All this was fine, but the problem was that the rehearsals always were around 5 5:30. I'd go to my job as a bun boy, I'd have to cut tomatoes and onions and make hamburgers. I'd smell like the kitchen of a drive in restaurant. And then go directly to the dance rehearsal.

I read somewhere, that one way to cut the smell of onions, was to wash your hands with lemon juice. I tried it. The only problem was, I could still smell the onions and now, there was the added smell of lemon juice on top of it. There are different types of education. There is book learning. I hold that in high regard, but there is the education born out of experience, it teaches that lemon juice will not cover the smell of onions...don't even try it. That was an informative experience.

We have those all the time!

I think Valerie suggested last week that we weren't sure of what we were getting into when we chose to do this series of sermons. She is right. It is humbling to come before you and speak about some off these things. Race, Education, Health issues.

But the church, where we've come from, where we are...it weighs in on us and so we are who we are and we speak out of our backgrounds and we pray that the God in whom we live and move and have our being has yet more to teach us and we pray that we are willing students.

Both of my sons are in the process of becoming teachers. David is teaching sophomore English at Arvada high school and my youngest son Jared is at Greeley finishing his degree we hope!. Lynn worked for the Superintendent of Schools at Rocky Ford when we were there. So education has been a topic of conversation in our house for the last few years.

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It can be political can't it? When a tax increase is voted down, like it was here this November, that means that new teachers won't be hired and that means schools and school administrators will need to find ways to do education in tightened circumstances.

Over the past few years the nation has been influenced by the No Child Left Behind law. I understand the in the new administration, No Child Left Behind will be kept, however some of it will be changed.

As I came to reflect on education and how it relates to the church I couldn't help but reflect on Education in the Methodist church. John Wesley was an oxford professor. Could have stayed there and been one for his whole life. When he sent out his preachers he provided them a living stipend and an additional stipend for books.

Over the years, The Methodist church has started over 1200 colleges and universities. 123 of those remain. Some of them you've heard of. The University of Denver, Syracuse, Duke, Boston University. The 13 seminaries, Iliff, Claremont, St. Paul's. Emory and so on. Jay Rundell former pastor here is the president of Methodist Theological Seminary in Columbus Ohio. Jeanne Haift, former pastor is the professor of Pastoral Care at St. Paul's. Some of the money you gave this morning, will be passed on to the Conference headquarters, here in Denver and will be passed along to the General church in Nashville and that money will go to help support the colleges and universities that continue to be supported by the United Methodist Church.

Yesterday, there were twelve of us from the church who went to Rev. Sharon McCormick's house to dream about the Adult Education Program here at AUMC. It was exciting and fruitful. Tam Curfman from St. Andrew UMC led us in the retreat. If you are familiar with St. Andrew, you know that it has one of the top Adult Education programs in the country.

It was exciting to be there. To get to dream like that with each other about what we can do. We were asked to do a single word prayer at the end of the retreat. And one person, said, "Elated". Who would have thought, you give up a Saturday morning for a meeting and at the end, you come with a prayer that says, Elated.

So certainly when I think about the Church's education program, I think about our church and what we provide to folks. Through the years we have, touched people in numerous ways... through Adult Education. We have the English as Second Language classes here. Most of you know that and several of you are part of that program. We've had many many people people go through that program here at church.

We've had our usual Sunday school education classes, Wednesday, Friday classes, various classes for women. We've had several different classes for people who were interested in honing their theological skills. We've done Disciple Bible study, and while that hasn't taken off here like some other churches, it's always very interesting to see what people are thinking when it comes to the Bible.

We've had video series, and classes to learn tai chi and drumming, reiki and classes on men's and women's spirituality, We've had grief support classes, and NA classes, classes on the single life and married life, and communications. We've had Iliff professors here, .

Arvada has placed an emphasis on Adult education through the years. And we can be proud of that.

Valerie and I were talking about the church and what we hoped it would bring to people. I mentioned how I hoped it would bring people a breadth. Helping them to see that the world was larger than what they might think. There is much out here to learn and taste and experience. And Valerie responded by saying what she hoped the church would bring people was depth. Deep and Wide, that's what I hope for us.

When Jesus goes to the temple as a boy, we notice how there is a give and take. Someone suggested that for education to really work, to really be effective, the receiver has to be hospitable to it has to welcome the teaching and then likewise have a capacity for it. We have to have within us an empty space so that we can take it in.

My prayer for us this day, is to remember that we are called to love God with our Hearts and minds. And to pray for the empty spaces to continue to be found in us. Amen.

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