

September 13, 2020

Deuteronomy 6:4-7
Proverbs 22:6, I John 3:18

As everyone I talk to is aware, involvement in a faith community, whether it is church, synagogue, mosque, or temple, is on the decline. For some in progressive circles worshipping a “god” just makes no sense. Most people are prepared to do good works, to care for the least among us, to try to improve the world, and many are convinced they do not need to be involved in a faith community to do those things.

I will admit that since our church went from gathering together on Sunday mornings to virtual worship at home, I have been worried that people are drifting even further away from Amicable Church. This shelter-in-place, keep a safe distance, wear a mask has proven to be both positive and negative for our church. The positive is how many more people we are able to reach by having our worship services online. Truth be told, I can use more creativity in virtual worship services than in traditional services. (In our sanctuary on a Sunday morning I could never sit with the children next to a toilet and talk about cleaning it.) And I have heard from many of you, saying you have found the virtual services to be more intimate, more personal, and, therefore, more meaningful.

Virtual worship services work well for adults. When we hear a sermon, which tries to put into a faith perspective our lived experiences, we have past life experiences that allow us to process what is being said. In some ways, it is a way to experience and process past experiences. As good as this is, it has revealed to me the importance of in-person gathering Sunday mornings for children and youth.

It is in church that children come to experience the teachings of Jesus and the importance of God’s love. Sure, they can experience some of this at home, but it is different when a non-relative adult tells them that they are loved or sets limits on their behavior or who asks for their help with a task. This experiential, relational love cannot be communicated through a virtual worship service.

This came into focus for me, when a colleague of mine shared something her grandson had written and read to his congregation. It is a powerful statement, written by 13-year-old Noah Quay in response to the injustices that are so much in the headlines. I share this with you here, because I believe, strongly, that Noah would not have been able to write what he did had he not spent time in Sunday School and church; had he not experienced the relational love offered in a healthy faith community.

Here is what Noah wrote:

“God made us equal, and told us to love one another as our brothers and sisters. To love one another is to be there for them, and to fight for them, when they are treated unjustly. We, as people of God and as genuinely caring people, cannot turn our backs on communities facing brutality and an unequal system, just as they have done for centuries. We need to embrace the struggle. Not to turn look the other way, while God’s children are attacked and oppressed, not to stay out of the problem, but to shine light and aid change. I implore you to acknowledge that black lives matter, and I ask you to do what is in your power to show your love and unwavering support.

“This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed” - Jeremiah 22:3.

“This means to stand with our sisters and brothers here on Earth, and those who have passed on. Breonna Taylor. Sandra Bland. Tamir Rice. George Floyd. Ahmaud Arbery. Kendrick Johnson. Elijah McClain, and too many more.

“I know that some of us find it difficult to help. Maybe speaking out is too uncomfortable. Maybe you simply don’t know how to. Having these difficult conversations with others and with yourself can be the first step. Investing your time and your love is the next. We cannot claim to love each other while standing by as they are beaten, killed, and subjugated. We cannot claim to love each other if we don’t love each other as our authentic selves, instead of as what we want people to be. We cannot claim to love each other, if our compassion is limited by our personal politics.

“I just want to say that I have the utmost faith in this congregation to do what is just. I’ve known a lot of you for all of my life, and I’ve seen the love and generosity you have for one another. You’ve supported me, and I’ve witnessed the love you have, even for strangers. This community is strong and kind, so I know that you are capable of what I’m asking you.”

I hope you are as moved, and impressed, by Noah’s words as I. He is not unique, though. In my three decades here at Amicable Church I have seen children and youth transformed by the love and support of this faith community. We have nurtured amazing children and youth into adulthood; young, and not so young now, adults who are creating a loving, just community wherever they go.

I hope, too, that you will agree with me that Noah and his thinking, as well as the children and youth of our church, past and present, offer a strong supportive argument for the relevance of faith communities in our world, especially

communities like Amicable Church. The truth is, ethical standards cannot be taught in textbooks, they must be learned through lived experiences.

If you agree with me, I pray you will double your efforts in support of Amicable Church and its children and youth programs, especially Sunday School. You can support our ministry by giving of your time, talent, and treasure, but most importantly by committing to go the extra mile and ensure your children and youth are actively involved in the programs we provide.

My lived experience here at Amicable assures me that such commitment pays off in mature, thoughtful, ethical young adults.

I would be remiss, if I did not end this sermon with a major “shout-out” to Amicable’s teachers and youth leaders, past and present, who have done such a great job in nurturing and loving our children and youth into adulthood.

May God continue to bless and grow this ministry of Amicable Church. Amen.