

What I know now

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost and Father's Day, June 21, 2015.

I speak to you as children-open wide your hearts also. 2 Corinthians 6:13

In the scriptures today we read about Job who lost his home, his cattle and his children. His well-meaning friends suggested that his troubles were the result of his sins. Job refused to accept that and believed that he was a basically good person and that all will be redeemed. Through it all, he was sure that the Creator is still very much in charge of the creation. Saint Paul writes to the people Corinth how he endured great hardship and tribulation as a missionary. He has endured it all out of love for spiritual family whom Christ came to save. Saint Mark records how Jesus out on the stormy sea calms not only the fears of the disciples but the storm itself as well.

Our nation has endured stormy times. During the last century, America was plunged into the depths of the Great Depression in the 1930's. I remember my 9th grade math teacher, Mr. Grzeszkiewicz, who lived through that time, telling us that we didn't know what it was like to not know where our next meal was coming from. We who had grown up in above average homes simply could not relate to what he was saying. It was a test of will not give in to the forces of fear and self-doubt. They survived the Depression and two world wars with everyone doing his or her part. The period following the end of World War II saw an unprecedented increase in church membership.

I was bred on the conviction that all people, regardless of condition, should have an equal opportunity for education, jobs and housing. I remember being told that I was young and idealistic and that full equality takes time. Years later, I still hold to that ideal, though it has yet to be fully realized.

There is a growing trend for high school graduates to take a gap year before going on to college or graduate school. I admire young people who have a sense of idealism. One high school graduate I knew decided not to follow the traditional path of his classmates and spent a year working among the poor in Bolivia. As a result, he had a clearer idea of what he wanted to do with his life. We need more young people with talent, ability and a vision for what they can do with their lives. People can spend years and a fortune working with a therapist to find out who they are and what meaning and purpose there is in life.

Because this is Father's Day I can't but help reflect back on the years when we were raising our children. I have to say I miss those times. Today would have been our wedding anniversary and I think of how those years of parenting went by so quickly. The decision to have children is an act of faith and after that it is a matter of raising them on love, patience, prayer and common sense. We gave them plenty of room to grow, nourished them with values that we believed were important and the rest was up to them.

I've heard it said that you don't know what you are getting in adopting a child, but the truth is that we didn't know what we were getting in our own biological children and, for that matter, we don't what we're getting in our selves.

It is both a challenge and a delight to see children grow and develop into having their own individual identity. While it is our job as parents to teach them what we believe is right and good, we can't assume that they will adopt our values. When they become their own people, they learn to think for themselves as they make their way in life. As bittersweet as it was, when they were ready and eager to get out on their own, I knew that it meant that we had done our job as parents. After that, we can't take credit for their successes any more than we can take blame for their failures.

Each generation thinks their parents are hopelessly out of touch. Growing up before the advent of the information age, we did not have calculators, computers, Internet, Google, E-mail, smart phones, facebook, myspace, Ipods, texting, twitter, DVD, CD, HDTV, ATM, or GPS. All we had was radio, hi fi, telegraph, telephone, typewriter, television and a turquoise Chevy.

When young people challenged our assumptions and questioned nearly everything, I realized that it is a necessary part of their development. They need to assert themselves as they develop their own thinking even though it left us feeling as though we were the bone on which they were cutting their teeth. Someone once described raising a teenager feels likes wrestling with an

angel who keeps turning into a turkey buzzard. If we are honest, we were most likely much the same with our own parents. It is the great test of faith to love our children especially when they are making it difficult to like them.

In this year 2015 I can't help but wonder what the world will be like in the year 2025 or 2050. Will we ever discover life on other planets? Will we have discovered a cure for cancer? Will we have learned to settle international disputes without resorting to war? And, will there ever be an end to racism and racially motivated gun violence?

Computers linked to the human brain operating on thought waves transmitted over cyberspace could be more than science fiction. Future generations could be teleported everywhere and never have to be stuck in traffic or ride crowded buses and subways. In any case, we can be sure that today's younger generation will be able to adapt to the on-going rapid pace of change.

I can't help but wonder where the data come from for statistics. A current statistic says that life expectancy for men is now 78+ years and for women is 80+ years. We are also told that we can add years to our life by regular exercise, eating a healthy diet that includes fruits and vegetables, regular prayer and a daily dose of aspirin. The more curious statistic is that being married will add five years to a man's life span while being married adds nothing to a woman's life span. When it comes to wondering where statistical data comes from, I have my own theory that 67.2 percent of all statistics are inaccurate...including that one.

While it is never easy to raise children, I have always liked what Theodore Hesburgh of Notre Dame University said about fathers that, "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." What we have to pass on to them it is what we have learned about life. We share what we have learned about faith and human relationships and provide the opportunity for them to express their questions, doubts, ideas and hopes. We all make mistakes and we have to forgive ourselves as we hope that they will forgive us.

I believe that both my wife Diane and our children Dave and Sarah were gifts from God. It is our hope to pass on to the next generation a better, safer world than the one we inherited. Whether that is true remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the most important thing we can give the next generation is our love, presence and support. We never cease being parents and they never cease being our children. It makes my day when the phone rings and I hear, "Hi, Dad!"