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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

12 June 2022

Dedication & Formation

Opening Greeting/Prayer

Please pray with me: Gracious God, you have called us to be like little children as we come to you because your renewed family, your in-breaking kingdom belongs to them. We ask you humbly and sincerely to open our eyes to the great responsibility that you have given us as a community of faith raising our children to know you and live in your way. Fill us with your Spirit's strength and creativity as we make room for this little one among us today. In Jesus name. Amen.

Telling the story:

Our scripture reading this morning comes from Deuteronomy 6:

“Shema, O Israel! Hear, my people, my church, my community! Listen, all of you who follow in Jesus the Christ's way. YHWH, the LORD, is our God, YHWH alone. Love YHWH with all of your heart and all of your being and all of your resources. Love with all that you are. Keep these words in your heart, these words that I am giving you today. Repeat them, recite them, teach them carefully to your children, to the little ones among you. When you are at home and when you are out and about, talk about them. When you go to bed or when you wake up to a new day, share these words together. Tie them to your hand as a sign, fix them to your forehead as a

symbol, and write them on your doorframes and gates as reminders to you. Listen, my people, YHWH, the LORD, is our God, the LORD alone.”

Message/Meditation:

I became a parent less than 3 years ago. I think that I would call myself a young parent, a young father, no matter what my actual age is. I often tell my children that one day, they will have a better dad, especially when they are upset with me. I know that I don't have my parenting all figured out, that I'm learning day-by-day right along with them, and I hope that the parent that I'm becoming is an improvement on the one that I am now. I want to look back and say with sincerity that I learned from all of those mistakes or mishaps as a parent and that I listened, even just a little bit, to the advice and wisdom of those who have been around children much longer than I have because that is what being a part of a community is all about.

Dedication and formation are at the core of what we are doing today in consecrating the parents and new children in our midst as a church. Part of what is happening this morning is all about dedication, dedicating yourself to the work ahead of you in raising your child or children in the faith that you have claimed for yourself and shared with the community in baptism. It's also about dedicating the whole of your child's life to what God may have in mind, a scary maybe or possibly reassuring action depending on who you are as a parent. What surrounds the dedication of parents and their children then is the dedication of the congregation, who walk alongside in love, support, and hope these families that have made this commitment before God. All of us this morning are dedicating ourselves too to those who are coming along behind us, those following us on this faith journey as we follow our Savior's way of peace and love.

Formation then is the second piece of this consecration because raising children in the faith that we claim as their parents is not a one-way street, in which we teach our children everything that they need to know, and that's it. By no means. I am a different parent now than I was three years ago because my spouse and my children continue to form me, teach me, challenge me, and support me as an integral part of the family. Having children, caring for children, raising children changes us, forms us, shapes us in ways that we may not even fully realize until later. So, part of the dedication is a commitment to formation, not only in teaching and sharing our faith with our kids but in realizing that we are on a journey also with our kids that is changing us too. A question then to think about is: what kind of parent do I want to be? Are there parts of me as a parent that I wish were different or tweaked in some way? These kinds of questions can be the difficult and sometimes downright frustrating parts of parenting.

When we enter the story in Deuteronomy, we join Moses and the covenant people of Israel on the eastern side of the Jordan River, opposite the promised land. This is the second time that the promised land has been within reach. The first time that God led them to this moment, the spies for the people were convinced that they were not strong enough to overtake those already in the land, so God led them back out into the wilderness until the next generation came to the fore, and all of those who had struggled to trust in God's leading were gone. Moses then has been told that he also will not enter the land with the people. Seeing the promised land, all that they had been journeying toward so close, Moses speaks these words over the people among many others, reminders of who has gotten them this far and who will see them to the end. I think of Moses as the ultimate parent, sharing all that he can with his children, this new covenant people before he is gone.

What stuck out the most to me from this passage, often called the “Shema” among followers of Judaism, is its simplicity. Loving and following God in the midst of the day to day, mundane, sometimes boring parts of life is what this covenant relationship with YHWH, the Lord, is all about. Sharing and talking about God’s words and commands even in the normal daily tasks are what show our dedication and form us into who God is calling us to be, surprisingly. We do not have a ten-step method to being the best parent in the world or a fool-proof parenting style that will make sure that our kids never make mistakes, embarrass us, or even suffer.

These kinds of simple routines and activities can be as simple as coming to church on Sunday mornings or sitting down together at the dinner table on the same night or day each week. Sometimes it’s an evening bible story before everyone goes to bed or a simple prayer talking to God about how the day went, what we are thankful for, and what is on our minds. For my family, it is a song, a prayer, and a story just before we go to bed and that’s every night no matter where we happen to be sleeping that evening. I cherish those moments as I cherished my parents walking into my room when I was young to pray with me before I went to sleep too. Still other times, dedicating our families to the formation of the Holy Spirit in the day-to-day can look like difficult conversations when things are hard, when a loved one passes away, or something happens that feels so beyond our control that we don’t have anywhere else to turn besides God and the particular body of Jesus-followers that we walk with. Sometimes we learn the most and teach the most to our little ones in the midst of the vulnerability and humility of not knowing what our next step is or trying to discern where God is calling us in the midst of the right now.

We remind ourselves and each other that many other gods will try to get in the way: fame, money, honor, power, ego, pride, arrogance, and so much more when all we are called to

do is keep YHWH, the Lord, the one who had called the people out of Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness up to this point, as the most important, the one alone who is worthy of all of the love and hope that we can muster. It is in those moments then that we trust that in loving God and sharing God's love with our children throughout each and every moment of our lives that somehow, God will move not only in us but in the little ones entrusted to us too.

Closing Prayer:

Let us pray: God of caring and enduring presence, we come to you this morning longing for your leading as we embrace and include our children in this journey of faith, following after your way. Give us, as parents and caregivers, the energy, strength, and vision to walk alongside our little ones in your hope and peace. Give our children your grace and openness that they would have the courage to follow along even when they don't understand or have questions that don't have easy answers. Help us to fill each and every moment with your love. In Jesus name. Amen.