

## **“The Apple Falls Not Far from the Tree”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
August 11, 2024 - Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

[2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33; John 6:35, 41-51](#)

Here, at the First Congregational Church in Stoneham, we have just completed a fantastically successful week of our Vacation Bible Blast summer program for children. Throughout this year’s program, called the Workshop of Wonders, our group of around 15 children, led by 15 youth and adults, learned all about how we are wonderfully created by God and empowered by God to do God’s wonderful work in the world. It was a great pleasure for me to be with the group this week, leading our Bible lesson times and providing some technical assistance, and I am deeply grateful to all of those who volunteered their time to care for our children and to provide them with skits, songs, snacks, science projects, crafts, and games, making it, indeed, a very special, meaningful, and enriching week for our kids and their families. I am especially grateful to Avari Wall and Donna Wall for directing this wonderful program, and I hope that they get to enjoy a little bit of well-earned rest now, knowing that their considerable contributions have indeed blessed many little lives, and some not-so-little lives as well.

I believe that one of the reasons this was a wonderful week is that, through this program, we as a church were doing one of the things that we are called to do, and that is to pass on our tradition of following the loving ways of Jesus Christ to our children. As their spiritual family, it is our calling to raise up our children in these ways, that they might embrace these ways of Christ as their own ways and join us on our shared journey as Christ-followers. And so we seek to create an environment here that encourages the realization of an old proverb, “the apple falls not far from the tree,” as our children and youth take on the characteristics of their older spiritual siblings and ancestors.

Yes, the apple falls not far from the tree in many ways, and we do take on the characteristics of those who have given us life. Our biological parents give us the DNA that shapes who we are and who we become, but we are also greatly influenced beyond that nature by how we are nurtured, and so those who raise us as parents and the communities that they surround us with as we grow -- our

families, churches, schools, teams, and activity groups -- play profound roles in our formation as people.

Consider the main characters of our first scripture lesson, King David and his son Absalom. As we've been recounting through our last few weeks' readings, David, though being called a man after God's own heart and being a creative musician and poet, was also a violent, destructive person. He was a warrior, and he conquered the giant Goliath and many armies on the battlefield, but his violent ways followed him from the battlefield to the throne room and all the other rooms of his palace. We heard in last week's reading from 2 Samuel that the prophet Nathan came to David to confront him because of the evil, violent acts he had done to one of his subjects, Bathsheba, and her husband Uriah the Hittite, that the sword would never depart from his own house (2 Sam. 12:9-12), that the apple would fall not far from the tree. Sure enough, David's own son Absalom rebelled against him, declaring himself to be king, acting violently against the king's household, and fighting against David and his armies, resulting in the slaughter of many thousands of men. In Absalom's life of violence, ending with a violent demise, the apple fell not far from the tree.

Thanks be to God, though, that although we do, through nature and nurture, take on many of the characteristics -- good and bad -- of those who have raised us and surrounded us, just as Absalom embraced the violent ways of his father David, we are not destined to be or become only what our parents and others around us have formed us to be. By the grace of God, we are given a will that is free, and we are able to choose for ourselves to journey down different paths than the ones that have been laid out before us. One of my great hopes is that we would continue to struggle together as a society to create an environment in which all people, equally, are provided the ability to follow the path of their own choosing. Another of my hopes is that people would choose to take paths that would lead them and others to experience more of God's blessings in this life.

This is what Jesus did with his own life. Though he was raised in Nazareth by Mary and Joseph, and surely had many of their traits, he recognized that he was also the child of his heavenly Parent, and he chose to be the apple that falls not far from this heavenly Tree, demonstrating through his own selfless actions the divine qualities of the one he called Father. He showed us how to live in love that

we would be like him in choosing to fall not far from the heavenly Tree, that his way of love would become our way, that the life full of God's life that he enjoyed would be lives full of God's life we ourselves would enjoy.

Trusting in him, following his way of love, we consume and nourished by a perfect Bread that gives us abundant, imperishable life. So, today, let us take this path of trusting in Christ, of looking to the loving and providing ways of God our heavenly Parent so that we can make these our own ways and experience God's abundant life, no matter who we are or where we've been on life's journey. And let us remain steadfast in our commitment to share this good way of love with our children, that they would grow and flourish as they are surrounded by God's love through us, and that they might be carriers of God's love for the generations to come.

May the world be blessed through us and our children this day. Amen.