



daileystory@gmail.com

September 8, 2019 Readings

13th Sunday after Pentecost
Jeremiah 18:1-11, Philemon
1-21, Luke 14:25-33

First UCC Richmond at Trinity Lutheran along with First Methodist because of 'Good Old Day's' parade.

9:30 Service

Choices cause conflict; in us
and in those we love.

To choose one thing is to choose
against others. We have learned
this since childhood: to choose
a best friend means that other
friends are not considered best.
To choose a partner means the
not-choice of other partners. To
choose a path, a career, a
priority, a place to live, a
pathway out of danger, a
change — all of these changes
introduce conflict: conflict within
ourselves; conflict with those
around us; conflict with those
who struggle to understand or
accommodate our choices.

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Families everywhere are now  
adjusting to routines of more  
structured days and evenings.  
While there is the inevitable  
sense of loss over the ending of  
the free patterns of summer,  
one positive addition that many  
families rediscover this time of  
year is family dinner time. Even  
if it can only happen a few  
nights a week, time around the  
dinner table is precious and  
meaningful. This week, I read  
an article by a blogger, Meg  
Conley, who shared a simple  
way to enhance family dinner  
conversations. She suggests  
having each person at the table  
share their responses to three

simple questions, which can be  
discussed as a family, with  
another adult, with friends, or  
simply in your own mind. If you  
keep a diary or a journal they  
are ideal prompts for some  
soulful reflection there, too.

Here are the three questions.

**How were you brave  
today?** I love this question  
because it is so strength-based.  
Asking people to highlight how  
they courageously faced a  
challenge is positive and  
hopeful. For adults, this could  
apply to anything from bravely  
facing an illness or loss, having  
a difficult conversation with  
someone who has hurt them or  
who spoke up upon hearing  
something offensive in their  
presence. For a young person it  
could mean talking to a teacher  
about someone who is bullying  
them or another child, or asking  
for help in understanding a  
difficult assignment. Life is full of  
difficulties at any age and it is  
inspiring to celebrate brave and  
courageous responses to life's  
challenges.

**How were you kind  
today?** This question reminds  
us that no matter what happens  
to us on any given day, there  
are always countless  
opportunities for both children  
and adults to practice kindness.  
Extending kindness to others  
can be as simple as the way we  
interact with a clerk or server, or  
calling or visiting a friend in  
need. A middle school student  
could be kind by befriending a  
child who has been  
marginalized by the popular  
crowd at school. Come to think  
of it, this same expression of  
kindness could be practiced by  
adults as well in their own  
contexts.

**How did you fail today?** This  
last of the three questions  
normalizes the fact that, in spite  
of our best intentions, on any  
given day, we fail. Sometimes  
we try something that fails,  
sometimes we fail to do  
something (like being brave or  
kind) that we wished we had  
done. A high school student  
might share that they tried to  
give a talk in front of the class  
that day without notes and they  
became embarrassed when  
they lost their train of thought.  
Or an adult might share they  
didn't speak up that day when  
they wished they had, or missed  
a deadline at work. They might  
even acknowledge something  
that they failed at as a parent.  
This question normalizes the  
fact that none of us are perfect  
and that the mistakes any of us  
make are opportunities for  
learning.

So how would *you* answer  
these three questions right  
now? Whether you answer  
these questions by yourself,  
with friends, or family around  
the family dinner table, I believe  
you will be inspired and  
enriched by what is shared, and  
what you learn about yourself  
and others in the process.

**School supplies** have been  
gathered and sent in many  
directions. Thank you to the  
many who participated.

## **Better-Together**

September brings in the Fall calendar and happenings of new beginnings. That is why it is always a 'September to Remember'.

Elie Wiesel was a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp. If you have been reading GRIND for a time you will remember that I met Elie Wiesel when I was in seminary. In his novel "The Town Beyond the Wall," a character named Michael has been in prison for a long, long time.

Michael [thank you Michael Piazza for the reminder] is talking to a new prisoner who has great faith. The new fellow asks Michael how he has been able to stay sane in prison despite such long and unrelenting abuse. Michael begins to tell him about a friend who has helped him survive by listening to his fears and comforting him.

As they talk, Michael, a confirmed atheist, sees a knowing gleam in the new prisoner's eye, and he screams at him, "Don't try and tell me that God sent this friend to be with me in prison."

"Oh no," says the believer, "I would never tell you that. God doesn't send people to prison, but God does come there to be with them."

That is what Jesus tried to tell us. When life shuts us out, God doesn't send someone to help us, but God comes to us where we are, making it a holy place. God

almost always comes to us in the skin of someone who cares, and God wears the most interesting disguises. The Bible says we may be welcoming angels without even knowing it, so we better treat everyone with dignity and hospitality, just in case.

The problem today is heaven is suffering a serious shortage of skin. There are not enough people willing to be outsiders for God to go to all those in need outside the camp/church building.. I believe God is calling us to deliberately and consciously live not as insiders, but as outsiders, to willingly choose the humbler place, a place outside the camp, which is perhaps the thinnest place between heaven and earth.

On the Wednesday 'Prayer Walk' we got into some of the history of the 'chosen' in Scripture. The Northern Kingdom was first to go; followed by the Southern a couple of hundred years later. 1 Samuel relates how Hannah first had to be healed prior to her prayers being answered. Hannah and God were better together. Now, check your index and see where the Book of Ruth is placed. Once found read the very beginning and see the time frame. Anytime you read the Scriptures note the who, why, and their relationships. Just saying, and doing this makes the Scriptures come alive.

There is a story about Mother Teresa, *The Light Still Shines*. She was visiting the outcasts to shine and let them shine. The story is told by Terry Hershey and can be found on You Tube and it tells how when her own life was racked with doubt and frustration and even despair that even from that dark place the light can shine. Just another story of Better-Together.