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LOVE, IN THE FACE OF HATE AND FEAR

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You've got to be taught
To hate and fear,
You've got to be taught
From year to year,
It's got to be drummed
In your dear little ear
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a diff'rent shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You've got to be carefully taught!

---from South Pacific

Currently, the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis is performing "South Pacific," a musical that was my father's favorite in the 1950's. It has been timely to

revisit the lyrics of this song and its call to closely examine what it is we teach our children ... and adults ... in both home and congregation.

If we want a different world than one that results in death and division, hatred and violence, fear and flight, we need to

- plan for it,
- implement it consistently,
- stand courageously against injustice targeting anyone, and
- catch kids and adults living with love, respect, and kindness toward everyone.

THE BACKDROP

As horrifying as the last week has been with the deaths of Black men at the hands of police officers, police officers at the hands of an angry, deranged individual, innocent little children caught in the crossfire of guns, and peaceful protest gone violent, this has also been a long season of harsh political rhetoric and individual hate speech and actions against anyone who is different.

WHAT DOES OUR FAITH HAVE TO SAY?

We are people who follow Jesus, the Living Word; learn from Scripture, the Written Word; and then seek to live this Word in all of life.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? ~ Micah 6:8

At the recent funeral of a neighbor, his wife described her husband's life of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. What greater, more faithful legacy could any of us leave? But first, it needs to be lived ... every day.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. ~ Luke 10:27

Living love. That is what it is all about. Loving God with everything you've got, with every action, with every word, with every thought. And your neighbor, especially those neighbors, like the Samaritan, who are foreigners, different from you, reviled by most. Jesus removes "us vs. them," and replaces it with a call to be one family.

Our Father ... ~ Matthew 6:9

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, the first words, "Our Father," establish our relationship to all of God's children as our brothers and sisters, calling us to treat one another with familial love.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ~ John 15:12

And isn't this a lifelong challenge to all of us?

HOW WILL WE DO THIS? FOR OUR HOMES

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The lyrics from South Pacific seem to point to how we raise our children in our homes, as the location in which we teach hatred and fear. That also implies that it is the place we can teach love and courage.

Modeling

The most powerful tool we have to shape our children's faith, values, and behavior is modeling, which is showing by our actions what we believe and want our children to follow. If there is ever a disconnect between what we say and what we do, children and youth will believe our doing over our saying ... every time! And that is what they will imitate and replicate. What does this mean? Every action, every word, every eye roll tells our kids what we truly value. Even humor - the jokes we tell, the jokes we laugh at when others tell them, and the jokes we let go unchallenged in our presence - reflect whether we respect others or find them less worthy. The words we use to describe others ... are they respectful? Do they honor our differences or divide us? Listen deeply and respectfully to understand others, not simply to wait until they take a breath to refute what they believe. Ask questions to learn, not to bait or shame.

Talk about what is on the news

Let kids hear what you think and believe. Explain what, from your perspective, is going on. Let them ask questions and bring you what they have heard outside of your home. Don't assume that they haven't heard or seen anything going on in the world.

Don't leave the radio or television on

Kids are sponges and assume that the way the media describes individuals and actions is the only way to understand it. If you have it on, watch or listen to it together and discuss it. This is a vitally important way for kids to learn higher level thinking skills and to routinely think critically about what they read, see, and hear.

Check what your kids are reading or watching on social media

This can be a very different source of perspective. Monitor your kids' use of social media. Discuss what they are reading or seeing. Challenge the perspectives with which you disagree. Affirm the ones with which you agree.

Encourage compassion and empathy

Ask youth to imagine what it must feel like to be a person of a different race, gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, experiencing words or actions you hear or observe. Role play how to report and stand up to bullying, even if it is not directed at your child. Read books together that share your values. When your kids act or speak with compassion and empathy, point it out and affirm it!

Have diverse friends

See them often. Stay in touch. Have them in your home or visit their home, if you are invited. Meet them to share experiences. Broaden your horizons of food and culture and arts and sports. One of my favorite quotations is, "An enemy is a person whose story you do not know." Take time as a family to listen to the stories of others. Really listen. Ask questions. Reflect. Seek to understand.

Serve others

Be servant leaders, but don't frame it as if you have superior position or power. Serve together with diverse others.

Pray

God is listening. Pour out your heart and your hurts. Invite God's wisdom and spiritual imagination to lead you where God is blessing. Really pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And mean it!

HOW WILL WE DO THIS? FOR OUR CONGREGATIONS

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Host conversations about race

This might be a book study. Consider *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* by Jim Wallis or *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Train facilitators. Establish ground rules, including guidelines for listening, speaking with respect, and the use of I-messages. Or invite a speaker or panel with diverse experiences to share their perspectives. Same ground rules. Don't do this just once, but let it be an ongoing series.

Gather with our brothers and sisters, who are different from us in any way, to have conversation and work together in service for the common good

Partner with another local congregation. Establish an ongoing relationship and shared worship, service, activities, and ministries. Identify the needs of your community and work on them together.

Reflect the issues of all people in prayers and sermons and where we devote time, talents, and treasure as a congregation

Invite every ministry team to examine what they do and how they do it through the lens of race. Are all represented? Are all welcome? Are all seen as children of God, created in God's image? Are all gifts utilized?

If our congregation lacks diversity, wonder why and what would be more inviting to a diverse population

Ask a trusted conversation partner to tell you the truth. Ask several. Never assume one can speak for all others. Don't assume that you can guess correctly. Then, listen, listen, listen. Take baby steps, just one little step at a time. Invite your congregation's neighbors to something of relatively universal interest, like a presentation on city park renewal or a parenting topic. Not on Sunday. Not in the sanctuary. Invite AA or Al-anon to use your facility. Host an outdoor movie night or an ice cream social or trunk or treat for the neighborhood ... with no ulterior motive. Invite lots of your members to be present to participate, to provide hospitality, and to build relationships with your neighbors.

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