

# *Wading River Congregational Church*

## **SERMONS IN PRINT**

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### **Ephesians 4:17-5:2**     *“Christian Parenting”*

I come to you this morning as a Christian, a parent, more specifically a mother, an educator, a member of this church family, a member of our larger community, imperfect, and a forgiven sinner. I can't say that a year ago I would have listed those roles in that order. It is through God's grace and mercy that I now recognize what God's intention for me and in turn for each of us is. As it is so eloquently put in Ephesians 2:10, our purpose is to do His work. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

God placed us here on earth for His purpose; he wants us to honor and glorify him and to tell others about his love. No, I am not going to tell you to dress up in your Sunday finest and go door to door. That is not where my comfort zone would be, so I can understand if it isn't yours. Although if it is your gift, feel free. However, I will say that the Bible does direct us to "go and tell". Tell what, and to whom? In particular this morning, what does that mean for us as Christians and as parents? As an aside, I use that term "parent" in its traditional sense, as well as in a more generic sense of "parent" as Webster would define it; "a protector or guardian" If you are not a parent in the traditional sense, that is okay, we are all placed here as parents in the more generic sense as Christians. We fulfill this role in the way we model our belief in Christ. There are more than a few individuals in this church who have been wonderful Christian parents to me at different times in my adult life. So now that we know this

isn't just about mothers or just about parents, it is about all of us as Christians let's talk about what "it" is.

Sometimes I read the newspaper or listen to the news, or even closer to home, listen to the conversations at the dinner table of situations that go on in our own schools and community and feel so discouraged. There are times when the stories are too overwhelming to think about. Behavior of our young people, and not so young people, can be disturbing and shocking, at times even devastating. Worse yet, what I have watched over the last few years is an increased acceptance, perhaps even a growing numbness or helplessness as we look at each of the situations when they happen. Do you know that violence in schools such as school shootings; doesn't even make the front page of the newspaper any more. What else is going on right around us that we are unaware of?

In our Sunday School we teach lessons from the Bible over and over again. We teach things like Jesus' messages that he shared in the Sermon on the Mount. We teach the Ten Commandments (God's basic rules we call them). Those are pretty cut and dried right? Don't lie, don't kill, honor your parents etc. Then there is the one about "loving the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul and all of your mind?" Do we do that? What does that even look like? We teach the students "how Jesus taught us to pray" in the form of the Lord's Prayer. We also teach one of my personal favorites, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:9).

We are in the process of teaching about the incredible power of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the early church which followed after a Pentecost celebration many years ago. We teach over and over about how to treat others; love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27-28), we teach about judging others. Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. (Luke 6:37-38). It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35). All of this teaching goes on and in spite of how wonderful our collective children are, and I mean that sincerely, I still see them saying and acting in a way that does not reflect what we know they know. It is a blessing that we can ask a 9 year old in Sunday School why Jesus died on the cross and he knows that it was to remove our sins, past, present and future. But, the question remains, why don't we see all of this knowledge in their actions?

I then realize what I have known all along on a different level, it is because kids don't learn to behave from listening to what we tell them to do, they learn to behave by watching and modeling what WE do. There in lies the disconnect. A quote that sums this up nicely I take from a wonderfully passionate Bible teacher, Beth Moore, "We accomplish little good when we tell of the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, but we live lives totally inconsistent with His Truth."

I was going to entitle this sermon "The Bible as a Parenting Guide". As the message began to come out of my head and hit the computer screen I realized two things. One, that the concept of using the Bible as a guide for anything would overwhelm many of us, although that is what God says it was written for. Secondly I realized, that the "fix" for this is in some ways much deeper, and in some ways much simpler than that. The simpler part first. Much of what the Bible tells us about how we should act we already know. There is probably not a Bible reference that I have used this

morning that you were unaware of. Many of the more basic messages about how to act have become what I will call "secular sayings". The saying better known as "The Golden Rule" is one of the verses I shared. We know the basics, that is simple. The deeper part is, how do we live the lives God wants us to live to reflect our knowledge for our children, for each other, and ultimately for the future of our community and the world?

I have to share a personal experience I had a few months ago. The mother of one of my daughter's classmates commented to me that my daughter is "one of the popular kids in school, so pretty and all". I walked away thinking to myself, after the mother pride in my heart settled down, I would have much rather heard someone tell me that she is a great kid because of how kind, or respectful she is to others. I use this illustration not to reflect attributes that my daughter may or may not have, but to illustrate what we as adults value. We like to blame media, (television, music, magazines, the internet) for the values that our children have. I would throw out the suggestion that as our children have adopted the values that society advertises 24/7 so have we! Not only do I believe that we have adopted the same values, I will also suggest that we are not even aware of it.

Recently I decided that I would attempt to stop judging others. Having a judgmental attitude about others comes from a place of pride. If we have the belief that our way, our decision, our beliefs are better than those of others, the human reaction to that is to "judge" them as less knowledgeable, efficient, Christian, whatever it may be, than we are. That is a topic for a whole other sermon. Back to my example, I made the decision to try and stop judging or at least to stop having comments come out of my mouth that were reflective of my judging. My sincere efforts lasted about 2 to 3 days and although I was only moderately successful, I was exhausted! But what occurred to me as I was focused on my attempt was how judgmental and in turn critical we are as a society. We are a society that judges anyone different than us. I

challenge you to try and stop the judgmental comments that come out of your mouths, not even addressing the judgmental thoughts that remain unspoken. Let me share a possible scenario. We want our children to be respectful to adults. Yet they hear us criticizing the adults we want them to be respectful of. How many of us share our frustrations with the schools or our bosses in front of our children? We want our children to be honest, yet they hear us telling lies. Perhaps they are "white lies" although I would suggest that there is not a foot note to the Ten Commandments that says that some lies are okay. We want our children to make good choices for friends and for activities that they choose to take part in to have fun. But we don't choose to include them in Youth Group Activities or Sunday School regularly.

Let me say, I am not here to judge you or the choices that you make for your families, for yourselves, for your time. I am here to plead that we as a Christian family need to think about those choices. I am here to challenge us to think about what we want for ourselves, for our children, for this community, for the next generation and to ask us to pray about what we are going to do to help, our children, and all of us, get there.

There are times when I am overwhelmed with the negative influences of our world. As adults we can choose to ignore them. My passionate motivation for change is the three beautiful children that God has lent to me to raise. I want them to know how to lead a Christian life way before they become adults and think to join a prayer group or Bible Study to learn. I also want them to LEAD that life. What do I do when I am overwhelmed with the weight of it all? I pray. There is a wonderful song by "Casting Crowns, a contemporary Christian band called "Prayer for a Friend". It is a song whose message I draw on when I am overwhelmed and wonder what to do when I have done everything I can think of and I still can't "fix it". Here is how it starts; "Lord I lift my friend to you. I've done all that I know to do. I lift my friend to you. Complicated

circumstances have clouded his view. Lord I lift my friend up to you. I fear that I won't have the words that he needs to hear, I pray for your wisdom oh God and a heart that's sincere. Lord I lift my friend up to you."

The reality of it is that it is just that easy to ask for help. As Jesus says in Luke Chapter 11: 9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." It does not say "try everything you can first, worry for a few days, or a few weeks and then pray as a last resort." God wants us to bring everything to him in prayer and petition. God promises to give us everything we need in return. By the way, hear those words closely, He does not promise everything we WANT. We often want much more than he knows we need. I am learning to trust that his plan for what I need is much better than any plan I could come up with.

Do you ever have doubts that the young people of today are going to be able to overcome some of the evil pressures that exist in the world today? Let me talk about what gives me hope. You give me hope. We are here at church. We love our children. We have a desire for them to be happy, whether we are sure of how to help them get there or not. Something else that gives me hope, attending a contemporary Christian rock concert where 7000 young people of all diverse backgrounds, stand up, singing, clapping and cheering like you would in any other rock concert, and then revert to silence as the leader of the band says, "Let us pray". THAT is awesome and something to be experienced. I have hope when I go to a Youth for Christ event on the East End of Long Island in one of our local high school auditoriums and watch three or four hundred youth listen to local rock musicians and Christian speakers.

God's promise as written in the book of Jeremiah, "I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble...Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears for your work will be rewarded declares the Lord...So there is hope for your future declares the Lord"

The good news is we don't have to "fix" it. We just have to plant the seeds. God is the only one who can fix it. What we can do is pray for God to be our strength. For God to show us how to model for our children the way He would like our children to act. By the way, if you need more guidelines, open the Bible, it is full of wonderful advice and would make a great "Guide to Parenting". It is of course the story of the greatest parent ever.

Let us pray. God we ask that you bless each of us as mothers, as parents, as members of this wonderful church family and of your larger Christian Community. We ask you to show us how to glorify you, by fulfilling the purpose you have placed before us. Amen