

First Church of Squantum  
Vacation Bible School

**Proverbs 20:11, 22:6, Mark 10: 13-16**

August 29, 2010

Michael S. Robertson

Three weeks ago I entitled my sermon, “What do you want”? Since that Sunday Emmy suggested an opportunity for us all to think about our “Commitment to Compassion.” Last Sunday Joy challenged us to become “Fruitful Soil” in accepting Jesus’ message. During the week between these two profound messages we held our third Vacation Bible School. It is what I experienced participating in this school that I want to talk about this morning, a morning when we hold our quarterly church meeting and prepare to begin another church year. Thirty children attended our vacation bible school this year and except for illness there was almost perfect attendance. When you read Debbie’s report you will gain a better understanding regarding how very successful our program was this year for all those involved. This also indicates a willingness by the parents of young neighborhood children to have them spend time here at First Church depending of course upon the program offered.

In the scripture readings we are told in Proverbs how very important it is to train a child properly because, “even a child is known by her actions.” In Mark we are told quite specifically how Jesus feels about little children. Jesus says, “Let the little children come to me, do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” How can we as a church encourage little children to come to Jesus? The five bible stories we taught had as their themes, **trust, love, follow, caring and sharing**. **Trust** was based on Abraham willing to leave his home and go to a new land because that is what God told him to do. **Love** was based on Joseph reaching out to his brothers after they had sold him into slavery. **Follow** was based on Jesus telling young men he picked as disciples to follow him. **Caring** used the story of the Good Samaritan to demonstrate who we need to care for and why. **Sharing** used the story of Philip sharing the Good News of Jesus with the Ethiopian official. These five themes were reinforced in the three other sections, crafts, snacks and games and every child took home a bag full of reminders. You should feel good about the program you helped sponsor here at First Church and I hope you will let Debbie know how thankful you are for her excellent work.

These themes; trust, love, follow, caring and sharing are foundational to the message Jesus brings and we can only hope and pray that the lessons taught will make a lasting impression, not only on the children who attended but also on their parents. Obviously there are many ways to share Jesus’ message of God’s love. Our Sunday worship service is only one of these ways and we can see that this service is not as central to the pattern of weekly living as it has previously been. There are many of our friends and family who do not regard regular attendance at a Sunday worship service as being particularly important. This is a fact that we need to accept and yet just this week we received in the mail this card inviting us to attend a new church. The River Church will hold their first service on September 12<sup>th</sup> in the Atlantic Middle School. The card reads; Real Life, Real People, Real God. It also says, Belong, Heal, Grow, Share. “The River is a place where you can

belong, where you can heal from the hurts in this life, where you can grow into the person you were meant to be, and where you can share those experiences with others.” The service is described as being, “A contemporary, casual experience. Come and see.”

Note that there is no mention of Jesus and there is no cross on the card but I am assuming that this is indeed a Christian church, that the Bible is referred to during worship and that the Real God they mention is the same God we are worshipping this morning. They obviously believe there is a need for another church in our neighborhood or they would not be sending out these invitations. Just like we are distressed when we are advised that a church is closing we should be happy when a new church is being started. How can we have too many churches? So this is something we should be happy about as others share our desire to share the Good News. We should pray for their success and as president of the Inter-Church Council of Wollaston and North Quincy I will welcome them into our fellowship. Starting a new church is indeed an act of faith.

Is there anything we ought to learn from this effort? Debbie turned away five children who showed up at the church in the hope that there might be a cancellation. There were others who had called after we had reached our limit so we are not sure how many children might have attended if we had been able to handle more. But it is not numbers we need to concern ourselves with but rather the quality of what we are doing and the results we are achieving. First Church has been here for over 95 years and I believe it will be here for another 95 at least. Now I seriously doubt that any of us will be physically present when the members celebrate the 190<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. But I do believe we will be remembered as having been an important part of the story they will want to tell as they celebrate.

Are we confident regarding the future of this church? Of course we are, otherwise why did we just install a 50 year roof and a new heating system that is guaranteed to last for at least 20 years? These are positive expressions of a real faith in the future of this church. These are the building blocks on which the future ministries of this church are based and I am happy to be a part of this renewal. The challenge we face is how do we reach out in a meaningful way to those who might be receptive to an invitation. What activities and programs do we need to offer that will accomplish God’s wishes in this community? Who indeed is our neighbor?

During the week of Vacation Bible School I presented the message to very young children each morning and then on Monday and Thursday afternoons I conducted worship services at the Marina Bay Nursing Home and Atria to a very senior group. What a blessing it was for me to have this opportunity to share Jesus’ message to such different audiences and see the impact it makes. Thank you for giving me those opportunities to share God’s love. We are doing good work and you need to feel good about what we are doing when we share our facilities and our ministries. In spite of what we may read in the papers or see on television there is a need for churches that spread Jesus’ message by their preaching, teaching and healing.

I recently read an article regarding the YMCA. Those four letters stand for Young Men's Christian Association, founded in 1844 by Sir George Williams. A new brand strategy they recently announced to address America's needs also included a name change to, "the Y" leaving out the "C". While the stated objectives may have remained the same why do they believe that leaving out the "C" will be an improvement? Do they believe that the C is not relevant anymore to the accomplishment of their stated mission. The original motto, taken straight from Jesus' prayer for believers, reflected its goal to cross denominational, racial, and social barriers: "That they all may be one; as thou, God, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Cornell student John Mott had his life changed by three sentences he heard in a YMCA sponsored talk in 1886: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not. Seek ye first the kingdom of God." Mott went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 as his work in the YMCA fostered "equality, justice and mutual respect" as he encouraged Christian schools, hospitals and businesses throughout the world. In 1978 Alexander Solzenitsyn challenged the Harvard graduating class with these words: "The West has finally achieved the rights of people, and even to excess, but people's sense of responsibility to God and society has grown dimmer and dimmer... We have placed too much hope in politics and social reforms, only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life."

How do you feel regarding the talk about the Community Center Mosque they are proposing to build in New York City near the World Trade Center? Depending on who you listen to there seems to be real passion regarding this proposal on both sides of the issue. As I have listened to this I am perplexed by the absence of Jesus' message of our need to love one another. Perhaps this is a propaganda move by people who do want to hurt us. So what! Jesus tells us that we are to love our enemies and that we are to pray for those who would persecute us. Yet people who claim to be followers of Jesus seem to be afraid of those who may think and worship differently. It seems to me that we need to place a greater trust God just as the founders of this republic did so many years ago.

**Trust** God, **Love** each other, **Follow** Jesus, **Care** and **Share**; these are five words that we all need to think about as we begin another church year.

Let us pray. God, we pray that you will open our minds to the reality of your presence in our lives. Help us to realize you are a God who loves us and knows our every fault. We pray that we will not drop the "C" out of our personalities. We may be stuck in a comfort zone where your daily presence is not always acknowledged. At times you may not be at the center of our thinking and we may say and do things we regret. We pray this morning for the courage to take that leap of faith that will change our lives. Once again we thank you for the Good News of your love. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN