

### PASSING ON THE RECIPE

Whenever a new baby is born one there are certain inevitable questions people seem to ask. Not just, “How much does she weigh?” Or, “What’s his name?” But also “Who does he look like?” or “Which side of the family does she resemble?” People often say things like “Well, he’s got his mother’s nose.” Or, “He’s a spitting image of his Dad.” Or, “She smiles just like Uncle Bill.” Genetics being what they are, we do seem to pass on certain physical characteristics to our offspring. I’ve got this short stubby thumb—it’s just like my Dad’s. And my poor daughter got it from me. I’ve also got my mother’s ear; it sticks out and has a slight dent in it.

I always have to laugh, though, when I show people pictures of my three grandchildren. “Oh my,” folks sometimes say, “She’s got your eyes.” Or, “He’s got your coloring.” Which is all well and good, except for the fact that my grandchildren are the offspring of my two *stepsons*!

Of course, there are far more important things that we pass on to our children. There things like holiday traditions and family recipes.

My grandmother used to make the best sugar cookies in the world. They were soft and chewy, with just a hint of nutmeg and cinnamon. But as much as we loved them, she refused to give my mother the recipe. She told Mom that she wanted to be able to make them as a special treat for her whenever she visited. That went on for years. But then the day came when we knew my grandmother was thinking of her own mortality for she presented my mother with a tin of her sugar cookies, accompanied by an index card. As she handed on the recipe to my mother she said, “It’s time for you to make them yourself,” she told Mom, as she handed on the recipe.

As much as we loved my grandmother’s cookies, though, it was her stories that we treasured. For they were wonderful stories. We especially loved the tale she told of the time her brother put the outhouse on the roof of the porch. We marveled at her accounts of working her way up from the floor of a knitting mill to the position of vice-president. We all learned much. We learned that gender doesn’t have to define who you are or what you do. We learned that hard work does pay off. We learned that creativity and a sense of humor go a long way in this world. And we learned that love is the greatest of God’s gifts to humanity. My grandmother’s story telling was her way of passing on to her children and her grandchildren the values that most informed her life.

Like my grandmother, we all have certain values, traditions and priorities that we want carried on. We all have beliefs that we hope will not die with us, but rather will continue to strengthen our families, our communities and humanity long after we are gone. If we die without a will, our possessions may end up in the wrong

hands, but at least they will not disappear from the face of the earth. But if we have not seen to it that our values, beliefs and traditions are transmitted to those who will survive us, then we do run the real risk that these intangibles will fade into history. I have my grandmother's old bookcase in my front hall because she saw to it that it was passed on to me. But more importantly, I share her love of reading and education because she took the time to teach me about those values.

Fortunately for the nation of Israel the great prophet Elijah understood the importance of passing such things along to the next generation. And so he saw to it that the spirit which emboldened his ministry, that intangible sense of God's presence, was passed on before *his* death. Our scripture lesson this morning from, Second Kings is all about the passing on of that spirit from Elijah to the younger prophet Elisha. It is also about the passing on of values and beliefs.

Just before Elijah parts from this earth in a vision of horses and chariots of fire, the older Elijah asks his apprentice Elisha, "What shall I do for you before I am taken?" Elisha wisely avoids asking for anything material. Instead he responds, "Let me inherit a double share of your spirit." Elijah tells the young man that he will know his request has been granted if he is able to see Elijah's departure—which he does. The rest of the Book of Kings relates many stories of Elisha's great work as a prophet—telling how he fully uses the intangible gift of spirit left him by the wise Elijah.

We may not have the mantle of prophecy to pass on to others, but we do have values, we do have traditions, skills and beliefs that we do want to see preserved and maintained. Important truths we want our children to know and to understand.

Certainly we can do that as individuals. But we also can do that as a community. And it is for that reason, among others, that we have gathered here to administer the sacrament of baptism. For in taking our vows as parents, godparents and members of this faith community, we have collectively committed ourselves to seeing that the values and beliefs we hold dear will be passed on to Abigail Baldwin.

Hear again what Matt and Elizabeth and Abigail's godparents have all promised: They have vowed to "teach Abigail that she may be led to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior." They have committed themselves to "help Abigail to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ." They have promised to do that "by celebrating Christ's presence, by furthering Christ's mission in all the world, and by offering the nurture of the Christian church."

And hear again what you and I have promised: "With God's help," we said, "we will live out our baptisms as a loving community in Christ; nurturing one another in faith, upholding one another in prayer, and encouraging one another in service."

**The Baldwins have promised to pass on to Abigail the beliefs, values and traditions of the Christian faith, and we have promised to provide the supportive community they will need to keep those vows. For the old African proverb is right: “It takes a village to raise a child.” And, sisters and brothers, in the sacrament of baptism we are taking responsibility for being an important part of that village.**

**This intentionality is absolutely essential, because, as modern psychology reminds us again and again, we pass on ideas and behaviors, beliefs and traditions, whether we are aware of doing so or not.**

**I am reminded of a story of a young woman who has just gotten married and is preparing her first big dinner. As she gets the ham ready to go in the oven she cuts off both ends of it, and then places it in the pan.**

**Intrigued her husband asks her why she’s cutting off the ends.**

**“Because,” she says, “That’s how my mother does it. I saw her do it that way all the time!”**

**The next time she visits she asks her mother why she does it that way. “Well,” says her mother, “I do it like that because that’s how Grandma always does it.”**

**Later that week the young woman sees her grandmother, so she asks her the same question. “And I guess that you do it that way because your mother did?”**

**“Heavens no,” says her grandmother, “I cut off both ends because all I had was a small pan and I had to make it fit!”**

**Whether we realize it or not, we are passing things on to our children all the time—how much better to do so intentionally! As the Witch in the musical *Into the Woods* sings: “Children will listen and watch.”**

**The fact that Matt and Elizabeth have brought Abigail here this morning bears testimony to that truth. For Abigail Grace Baldwin is the great-granddaughter of Marshall and Hazel Baldwin—two folks well known to this congregation for their faithfulness to Christ and Christ’s church.**

**Knowing we would be here this morning I went back and looked up the homily I offered at Marshall’s Memorial Service a little over two years ago.**

**“Marshall Baldwin,” I said, “built his whole life on the words of Jesus. His actions very much reflected his beliefs. He truly believed in the importance of loving one’s neighbor, of treating the other person with love and respect. You could see that in his great concern for AIDS victims in Africa and his generous support of the work of Willie and Anne Salmond. You could see it in the way he was always willing to**

help folks out with practical solutions to their problems. Even in the last week of his life, a friend called Marshall with a home construction conundrum, for he knew Marshall would help if he could . . . .”

Back then I reminded folks that everywhere you look in our meetinghouse you see signs of Marshall’s putting his faith into action. The racks for communion in front of you in the pews; the footstools at your feet; the racks for our offering plates. The beautiful cadenza at the back of the sanctuary. All built by Marshall. All examples of his faithfulness to the church. Things that he passed on to all of us.

But the fact that his grandson Matt is here today with his wife Elizabeth to have their daughter Abigail baptized is far more significant than any of the beautiful things Marshall made with wood and nails. For their presence here bears testimony to the fact that Marshall and Hazel, supported by this congregation, passed on the legacy of faith that is found in this place, among these people. No doubt, a similar story could be told of Elizabeth’s family as well.

Yesterday morning we talked to my grandson Zachary on the phone. He was all excited about the fact that later in the day he and *our son* Matt were going to the movies to see *Curious George*—and afterwards they were going to make rice krispy treats. When we told my mother-in-law about the conversation, she smiled. For she was the one who taught Matt how to make the marshmallow and cereal treat. Another recipe handed on!

But, as I thought about it, something far more important was being passed on as well. For in making the treats with Zachary, in rewarding him for a week of good behavior by taking him to the movies, our son Matt is passing on to Zachary a wide array of values and beliefs. Including, and most importantly, the same belief that has been passed along in the Baldwin family, and that, quite simply, is this: every child is important; every child should have a place. Ultimately, that is what we affirm every time we baptize a child. Every child is important. Every child from Abigail to Zachary, every child from A to Z!

Might we all keep the vows we have made this morning so that one day *our* children’s children’s children will have a place and a people where they can come to know about the love of God. Where they can receive a double portion of the spirit. Where they can be taught the values, the beliefs and the traditions which inform our lives. Where they can hear the stories of the faith.

Amen  
John H. Danner

This sermon was preached under the title *Horses of Fire*.

