

## ***To the Seventh Generation***

**Text: Genesis 35:16-21; I Corinthians 13**

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**A golden nugget of Iroquois wisdom steps to the pulpit with me.** It bears a near-perfect fit on a day when mothers and families, parenting, and the values of home are so close to heart. It comes in the form of a question asked, simply this: "How do my actions today affect life to the seventh generation?"<sup>1</sup>

That's an awesomely large and sobering thought! And refreshing, too, as it shifts the focus from our smaller concerns, our daily dramas, yours and mine – and turns to a far more critical horizon. Even more, it places the mantle of responsibility on the here and now and on our part in a world that we are honestly privileged to borrow and inhabit for only a very brief time. Again, "How do my actions today affect life to the seventh generation?"

I want to offer three promises today that I hope will be yours, too, as we open our awareness to those who will live as long as seven generations after us – all the way to 2153!

**To the seventh generation: we promise to embody and teach, in our time and toward yours, of reverence for life and the goodness of God!**

Martin Luther said more than 500 years ago that the primary task for people of faith - such as we are - is to "theodidacte." That's a pretty heady and theological word, but it simply means to teach of and toward and about the reality and perspective of God. It's something we all need, as does our aching world. We need whole communities and countless gaggles of people who will live and display every day that life is amazing and mysterious and pure gift; and that God is alive and merciful and good and gracious as the source and destiny of all living things.

Through various chain of circumstance, a pastor buddy of mine visited a Jewish home one Friday night.<sup>2</sup> It was entirely random and unplanned. His car had broken down and their door was the nearest one on which to knock. He was welcomed with warmth and hospitality. As he explained his situation, he couldn't help but notice how visible the faith of this family was - the blessing over the door, the candles lit at the table, the scriptures opened nearby, a few paintings on the dining room walls of their Jewish heritage. He stayed for only a little while and thanked them, but as he left, he took this wondering with him: "If someone came to my house randomly and unplanned like that, would there be any visible evidence that the perspective of God matters to me at all?"

Please, we can't take this for granted! It doesn't just happen! Passing on the power of faith and reverence for God is something for which entire systems of support are needed: churches and communities, families and parents, villages and homes – because we cannot do it or go it alone. And yet, by apparent measures of significant variety, less and less time and resource in our culture are prioritized for intentionally transmitting the awesome goodness of God.

**To the seventh generation: we will work hard, and then harder yet, to ensure that you have a safe and secure world in which to flourish and grow!**

I tremble to promise so much because I know how powerless and tender so many of us are feeling about this. Boston, Sandy Hook, Aurora, Tucson, Virginia Tech, Columbine, the streets of nearly any city. These are not far and distant places. They are right here. And since Sandy Hook, 3,839 deaths (I checked on Google an hour ago) have senselessly happened through the barrel of a gun.

Marian Wright Edelman spoke to an interfaith gathering of religious leaders at Immanuel Synagogue here in West Hartford right after Sandy Hook. She never minces her words: "Never before have so many children been exposed so relentlessly to cultural messages glamorizing violence *with so few mediating influences from responsible adults!*" (You could hear a pin drop.) "Never before have we experienced such reckless reliance on violence to solve problems, feel powerful or be entertained."<sup>3</sup>

Those words raced back to me as I read *The Hartford Courant* on Monday morning. Page ten featured a picture of a child, a tiny girl not more than 6 or 8, being taught how to hold an assault rifle. The photo displayed an "air-soft" version fashioned for children. The man teaching her looked plenty compassionate enough. But really? Please! This is just too far over the edge and far beyond the tipping point to remain silent! The headline for the story was: "NRA Seeks to Highlight its Armed and Fabulous Women."<sup>4</sup>

Long ago, a mother named Rachel died in childbirth. Before her last breath, she cried out and with a name, Benoni, which means "son of my sorrow." In Hebrew tradition, a child's name is not just a way of identifying a person, but actually forms who that child would become. And so, to name a child with sorrow would cast an ominous worldview of sadness upon his days. But Jacob, the boy's father, wanted their child to grow up living with hope. He knew his Hebrew well, and so he tweaked the name that Rachel had chosen and called him Benjamin. And that single change led Benjamin to live an amazing and hopeful life.

Please, friends: we cannot allow anyone to name our children with sorrow, or our families with fear, or the world as hopeless! And what we choose to say or do in the face of this violent culture today will absolutely affect a baby born in 2153!

**I hope you are still with me!** We are promising ó and I hope it's we ó the goodness and benevolence of God embodied for tomorrow's children, and reverence for life, and a safe world in which to live. Here's one more.

To the seventh generation: We will invest everything we can for you with the power of love! Because here's the thing, and we all know it: Without love we are nothing, gain nothing, have nothing. We will not short-change you as to the mystery or power of this gift. We can't explain it. We've got to live it. We promise this deepest of all. Because love is of God, and it is the most precious treasure that any on this earth have come to know.

A conference at the Center for Compassionate Living in Maine<sup>5</sup> hosted a thousand people. Among other things, they were asked by the leader to respond to this question: "If you knew that your life would be over in twenty-four hours, what would you do, how would you spend it, and who would you spend it with?"

Later, as the leader facilitated the responses, he noted that not one person said: "I will play with my iPad. I will sit in front of my computer. I will text my friends. I will go back to work. I will stew in traffic for hours in my car. I will fight with those who don't see it my way. I will go shopping. I will worry about my hair and my weight." Instead, a thousand voices spoke of loving family and friends, making peace with all beings, and spreading as much laughter and tenderness and love as life can hold.

"This is by far the greatest of all," Paul wrote. "Hands down, no contest, the greatest of all! It's what Jesus came to tell and teach. Faith is important, yes. Hope, absolutely. But the greatest of these is the awesome power of love."

**And so, to the seventh generation, we promise these things because we hunger for them ourselves: love and safety and security and reverence for life and the vast goodness of God.** May we do our best to deliver these gifts! May we not fail or falter in bearing your future whole!

One more thing. To the seventh generation: we love you today, even though we do not know you, because we know God loves all the children of the earth. All children. In every time. With no exceptions. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [Wikipedia](#), 2013. The principle of the seventh generation originated with the Iroquois "a portion of their Great Law of Peace - which mandates conscious awareness of and concern for seven generations ahead (140 years into the future) in deciding whether decisions made today bear the ethical and moral basis of truth. "In every deliberation, we must consider the impact on the seventh generation, even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine." This is an often repeated saying, and most who use it claim that it comes from "The Constitution of the Iroquois Nations: The Great Binding Law."

<sup>2</sup> Story as told by the Rev. Martin Copenhaver, Senior Pastor, Wellesley Village Congregational Church UCC, MA.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, eds. [Prayers for a Thousand Years](#). Harper, 1999, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Corrie MacLaggan and Amanda Orr. "NRA seeks to highlight its 'armed and fabulous women.'" in [Hartford Courant](#), Monday, May 6, 2013, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, eds. [Prayers for a Thousand Years](#). Harper, 1999, p. 305.

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