

**Sermon, June 14, 2020**

**Perry Montrose, Director of Faith Formation**

We are glorious. Children and youth, you are glorious. You are who you are meant to be. Now, some may say “hide away,” but we say, “Come. Be seen. You will be loved as you are.” And who are you? We asked you to share some of what you consider to be your core characteristics. These are some of the responses: strong, sweet, funny, adventurous but balancing risk taking, open-minded, competitive but loving and helpful, empathic, comforting, curious, spiritual, creative, thoughtful, kind, and fun.

Those are wonderful things to be and sometimes hard to live. Knowing when to be competitive and when to be helpful. Being sensitive to others and empathic, but finding the strength to set appropriate boundaries when you need to. You are learning to live into who you are and what that means when it comes to the world around you. Sometimes other people have expectations of who you should be. The thing is...you have to discover that for yourself and get comfortable being who you are, so you're not scared to be seen, as the song says.

All Souls is a place where you can explore who you are and how you want to be in the world. When youth graduate, like the five bridgers today, one of the greatest things they say is that at All Souls they were free to be who they really are. They could show their whole selves and know they were going to be embraced and encouraged. That enables you to grow emotionally and spiritually. Becoming who you are is not always easy. Know that All Souls will be a place that makes it easier and supports you.

Adults, the same is true for you. You also need to show up as you are. When I was a child and to this day, whenever my mother is going out somewhere, she says, “I have to put my face on.” In addition to that meaning some makeup and wanting to look her best, there is a feeling to it that we all recognize. It is the idea that we have to show a certain face to the outside world. Our strength, not our weakness, is what people want to see. Yet, we know it is our imperfections, the bruises that we have sustained, that make us who we are. You do not have to put on a face or be standing strong to be seen at All Souls. Our faith is not about projecting an image but standing in the light of who you are.

But, how do you stand in that light when you can barely get through the day? These have been difficult months and especially trying for parents who have been juggling even more than usual. We sometimes advise one another but, ultimately, it's not about what to do, rather how to be present for each other. "To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts," Henry David Thoreau claimed. The day has a greater sense of well-being when you know you can share what's happening and a faith community will be there to support you.

To support the children and youth, it is our role as adults to be the little flame that lights the tender kindling of their souls. There is not any specific knowledge or skill that they need from us, rather they need our authentic presence. Henrietta, who had plenty of teaching experience in the school setting, stepped up to be a Faith Formation teacher for the first time this year. It was a struggle for her at first. Our imaginative, talkative, creative 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders are full of life and sometimes go their own way. Henrietta was frustrated that she couldn't get through the lesson plan and didn't want to be a disciplinarian, but she was feeling like a failure. Then, one Sunday, everything changed. As Henrietta explained to me, she decided to be herself and honest. She responded with her innate sense of humor and also told the youth that they were annoying her at times. She let go of the pressure of finishing the plan and was present to the energy in the room, including her own. Educator Parker Palmer explains, "By choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am." A real, meaningful connection developed between Henrietta and those young people. It is ongoing. As Clara and Lillith read in our welcome, "Connections are made slowly, with tending and growth."

And so it is for all of us connecting at All Souls. We weave connections by reaching out and bringing in within and beyond our walls. How fitting for these times that our slideshow song, "This Is Me," says, "We are bursting through the barricades and reaching for the sun. We are warriors. Yeah, that's what we've become." Our speaking out for a just and equitable world is the greatest Faith Formation lesson. Our roaring blaze of warmth and love and community lights will spread from heart to heart, and light our way. When we love our children into being and show them what it means to help transform the world with that radical love, we have formed an enduring faith that truly serves all souls. May it be SO.