

Sermon For Youth + Family Sunday
November 20, 2016

If you haven't met us yet, I'm Megan, this is Aaron and our daughter Norah. Seattle First Baptist Church has been a special place to us, because it's a place that has been there for all of us. As a family, we are involved with family and young adult activities for the group of us, and each one of us, Norah included, is involved in some other activity in these walls just for us. Aaron has had the opportunity play music, I am going to chair the CFYA committee next year, and Norah sings and plays in the children's choir, and she acts in the children's play.

AARON'S SECTION: Today's service is centered around our children and families. And the message is about gratitude. And that idea is a little more radical than it might seem.

This year of all years, as we travel to Thanksgiving dinners across the country with our extended families, I wonder how easy it will be to be compassionate, kind, gentle and patient. I know it's not always easy in my extended family, and I love them all dearly. Sometimes it's not even easy with one of my own brothers, and we talk or text each other nearly every day.

I have to look to my own family, the person I chose to marry and the child we chose to have, to peel back the messy layers of how we engage with people and remember how we're supposed to engage people. How we're supposed to celebrate our commonalities and our differences. We're supposed to be grateful for them both.

There's a lot of sameness within a single household. It's easy to imagine similar opinions, histories and traditions. But for it to work, we have to recognize and celebrate our differences.

As we were discussing what to share with you all today, I remembered a story from when Norah was just 18 months old. We had just moved into a small house in West Seattle, and Norah discovered that if she walked just around the corner from our house, she'd find a couple of cats rolling around the driveway of our nearest neighbors.

I used to get confused when Norah would run to the door saying "Maw maw! Maw maw!" and I'd say "Mama's right here" and point to Megan. It took us a while to realize she was saying "Meow meow! Meow Meow!" and she wanted to go see the cats.

There was a problem with this new obsession. As I was sitting at work one day, Megan sent me a text message.

"I think we should get a cat," she wrote.

I responded, "We're dog people. We've discussed this."

Megan replied, "Yes. But our daughter is a cat person."

And oh was she. When we walked into the Humane Society, Norah at about 18 months old saw cats in every possible direction. And you could tell that she was amazed and that she had no idea that so many cats could exist in one small place at one time. At one point she'd spun circles in the room looking at all the cats around her saying "Meow meow! Meow meow! Meow

meow!" And she froze for just a second almost like she didn't know what to do. And after just one moment, she just started laughing this guttural, deep laugh of pure joy.

So we adopted Willow, who the Humane society claimed was 10 and who was probably older than 13 according to the vet and who lived her last few years on this earth with us in West Seattle. And Norah wasn't the only one who completely fell in love with that scruffy looking cat whose hair was always matted and who would kick her leg like a dog if you scratched her under her chin.

MEGAN'S SECTION: We're thinking of this story in the context of today's Bible verse, which talks about being compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient. Being tolerant, forgiving.

And at least in our family, we try to meet each other where we're at, and honor who that person is. Even if two dog people somehow got a cat person for a kid.

The bible passage for today makes total sense to me in the context of our family. We try to treat each other with compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience. We bear with each other and forgive each other. We make room for each other to make mistakes. And all of this is possible because of love. And I am thankful beyond words to be part of this family. When we are at our best (which is not always), I can feel the message of Christ to love God and love each other dwelling among us.

In my immediate family with Aaron and Norah I have experienced this feeling and way of being. I know that these bible verses, though, are not just talking about families made with marriage and DNA. In Christ the whole world is my family, the whole country is my family...and that is much harder.

Which is one of the many reasons that I am grateful for Seattle First Baptist Church. In this place many different families with different backgrounds, different beliefs, and different ways of being have come together to make a community. We don't agree with each other about everything, but we try to treat each other with compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience. We bear with each other and forgive each other, because we love each other. When we are at our best (which is not always), the message of Christ to love God and love each other lives among us, it fills the air we breathe. We are able to teach each other, admonish each other, and still sing together. By practicing being family in this community I am better equipped and able to bring this way of being into my interactions in daily life. I move closer toward that ideal of the whole world being my family. And for that I sing to God with gratitude in my heart.