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Reflections before Rituals

(Parent/Child Blessings, 4th Grade Blessings and Parrot Pinning)

Joseph Campbell was a professor of literature at Sarah Lawrence College in NYC. He died in 1987- During his lifetime he did a lot of work in comparative religions and you may know his name from that work - I am most familiar with The Power of Myth- and highly recommend it.

This morning I am going to begin with a quote from Joseph Campbell.

“A ritual is the enactment of a myth. And, by participating in the ritual, you are participating in the myth. And since myth is a projection of the deep wisdom of the psyche, by participating in a ritual, participating in the myth, you are being, as it were, put in accord with that wisdom, which is the wisdom that is inherent within you anyhow. Your consciousness is being re-minded of the wisdom of your own life. I think ritual is terribly important.”- Joseph Campbell

And so we begin a morning filled with rituals- and therefore- according to Joseph Campbell- a morning filled with myths that we carry with us here in this community.

It is an honor to be a part of the rituals we will share today.

The dedication of new babies born in the past year.

The blessing of our 4th graders

And the pinning of the parrot for our community members who have turned 50 in the past year, or have joined our community since they turned 50 years old.

If Joseph Campbell was right- each of these rituals we practice are a way for us to re-enact some collective, deeply held myth. I have been wondering what some of them are...What matters to us as a community at CMCL?

We strive to be open and affirming- welcoming anyone and everyone who comes through our doors. I think that is one of the most unified beliefs we carry here at CMCL- we teach it to our children- we say

You are Known and Loved by God.

What a beautiful and powerful message.

It is this belief that holds us together as a community.

That language is a mantra we share with children during communion- we painted it on the wall for everyone to read as they first enter the church –

and we give a lovely piece of artwork done by one of our own, Beky Weidner- to our 4th graders -You are Known and Loved by God.

I have to say, though, that it seems to me, as lovely and powerful a sentiment as this is... that it is more of a starting point. And starting points are important- they get us on the right track.

But just to have knowledge alone, is not the end game.
Our knowledge should both equip us and liberate us to move out of our conviction to do
...
Something. To know that we are known and loved by God compels us to serve and love
others. The next step, then- is to live out that knowledge.

And I believe there is no better way to do that- to practice love- than in community.

You see, the old adage is true- that no one is an island- we live in community- regardless
of whether we acknowledge it or not. Like it or not - No one is successful only of his or
her own accord- and no one falls into poverty only because of his or her own behavior-
We live in a world of symbiotic relationships with every living thing around us-
And the actions of any one of us inevitably affect the rest of the community.

And communities are the place where we figure out who we are- where we have the
freedom to explore different parts of ourselves- and to know that we will be accepted and
loved. Communities are where we can come when we are in pain and cry, 12that we will
be forgiven... communities are where we can laugh so hard we literally pee our pants-
and our friends will tell that story about us for the next 20 years.

You see- our rituals here today re-mind us to live out love.
To show empathy- compassion, humility and grace in all that we do.
To be community to one another.
To welcome those who are unloved elsewhere.
And to remind them that they too are known and loved by God- and therefore known and
loved by us.

In the rituals today- with our children, and our wise aged ones. We are remembering that
we are known and loved by God- and that we are called to treat others in a way that
acknowledges that they too - Are known and loved by God-

And it is this myth- that holds us together and gives meaning to our rituals. In many
ways, we are challenging a culture that demands only the successful can be loved. A
culture that says only the beautiful, rich, white, straight- should be loved - And God
knows they should be loved- and we cannot lose sight of loving beautiful, rich, white,
straight privileged people-

But our desire here at CMCL is to raise and nurture our community members (that means
each of us) to love anyone and everyone who comes across our path with the love of God.

And when we say a prayer of dedication on our babies- it is a blessing for them to live in
this knowledge- as well as to become ambassadors of love because of that knowledge.
And when we bless our 4th graders today- and give them this artwork to put on their
walls as reminders that they are known and loved by God- we want them to not only
know it- but to live and move in their world in a way that they also strive to know and
love the people around them as God does.

And when we do the parrot pinning for our wise ones- experienced with successes and failures in life- we want to encourage them to be authentic members of this community- as role models, as leaders- and as practical human beings who
Do things right sometimes. And other times screw up like the rest of us - But show us how to be human with humor and humility and grace.

Because I believe that it is in communities that we are formed and grow and become- and it is a blessing to all of us when we find a community where we can truly be ourselves- and still be loved.

Ah- that is what it means- right?
To be known and loved-
To be truly ourselves- all the warts and all the beauty-
And to still be loved.

Because isn't it true that we see the face of God in our neighbor?
Then we would also be the face of God FOR our neighbor?
My prayer for us is that we might find real community right here-that we might be community.
Amen