

January 21, 2024
Third Sunday after Epiphany

Meditation: "The Parable of the Three Little Pigs"

The scripture reading this week is almost identical to the one we read last week: Jesus calls disciples. I already talked about 'call' last week, so I was at a loss for what to say today. How would it be if I told you a parable?

Once there was a family of pigs. There was the father, Mr. Hogg, his wife, Sowina, and their three sons, Freddy, Wally, and Irving. One day as Mr. Hogg was leaving the house, he said to his wife, Sowina, "I'm heading to market. I don't expect I'll return home again. I have put aside enough money to take care of you, and to build each one of our sons an identical small bungalow for them to live in when they grow up." With that said, off he went, and, as he had predicted, he never returned home again.

The years went by and the boys grew. Freddy, the eldest, was the first to leave home. Freddy was an introvert, so to say that he was friendly was somewhat misleading. Really, he was only friendly with his mother and brothers, and even then, not always with his brothers. His mother had a fine brick bungalow built for Freddy to live in, but not really caring for people he spent most of his time indoors. However, Freddy was very proud of his home, and since he was friendly, he offered to host family dinner on Sunday evenings.

Things went along fine with Sunday dinners at Freddy's place, until Wally was old enough to leave home. His mother had a lovely brick bungalow, identical to Freddy's, built for Wally. Wally too was very proud of his home. He hosted family dinners quite often at his place, just not on Sundays. Freddy could often be found outside his home, working in the front garden, or sitting on the porch. Whenever he saw someone draw near, he would call to them, "Welcome to my home! Come. Allow me to get you a cold drink. Sit a while, won't you?" On occasion, Wally was entertaining someone at his home on a Sunday and had to send regrets to Freddy for Sunday evening family dinner. Then it would be only Freddy, his mother Sowina, and his brother Irving for dinner.

A few years later Irving reached the age to leave his mother's home. Irving was an extravert and got along with everyone. His mother built him a beautiful brick bungalow, an identical match to Freddy's and Wally's. Irving was not a homebody at all. He would leave home in the morning and be away much of the day. It didn't matter where he went, shopping in town, to the fair, or to a soccer match, Irving would meet someone new and invite them back to his place for dinner. Very often, Irving would be entertaining on a Sunday, and seldom went to Freddy's for family dinner. Sometimes, it was only Freddy and Sowina for supper on a Sunday evening.

Freddy's place seldom had anyone but Freddy there, and it fell into a state of disuse and disrepair. Wally kept his place well maintained, and he sometimes had company, if anyone travelled past. Irving's place, however, was overflowing with people, and he had to add one addition after another to be able to host all the people who visited.

This week, the Central Board met to talk about the future of this congregation. One of the things that we talked about was the importance of calling others, individuals or congregations, to see how things are going for them. Sometimes we might learn something helpful to us. Sometimes we might just listen. Other times, there might be an opportunity to invite them to join us for a worship service or a study or for Wednesday morning coffee or whatever.

Congregations are like Freddy, Wally, and Irving. Some are friendly, but really only with each other, and they don't know how to treat someone who happens to walk in the door, and so they leave again. Gradually, their building falls into disuse and disrepair as members grow old and die, finances dwindle, and people tire of all the work.

Some are welcoming when someone new comes in. The newcomer finds a welcome and stays, but seldom does anyone new cross the threshold. Their buildings are usually well maintained, which keeps new people coming in, from time to time, but usually only enough people to keep finances and the volunteer base from petering out entirely.

And some are inviting. They go out into the community where everyone else is, and invite those whom they meet to join them. They know how to treat them well, and how to integrate them into the congregation, so they grow, and add onto their building, or move to a larger building.

Last week I talked about Jesus calling his disciples, and God calling us, usually through another disciple, and not directly. After today's parable, I realize that the 'call' doesn't stop with us; it's not that we are called and that's the end of it. We are called in order to extend the 'call', the invitation, to others.

The question this week is, do you want your church to be a Friendly Freddy, a Welcoming Wally, or an Inviting Irving?