

According to Mark . . . September 2017

As the kids go back to school, it reminds me of why we have schools in the first place. No, it's not just a place just to send many of our kids while many of our adults are working (though that's not a coincidence of scheduling). School does more than just reading, writing, and arithmetic: it teaches how to navigate the world in one-on-one and group interactions in many settings and contexts in preparation for adulthood. What we learn at school we talked about with peers, parents, and others so that we could learn and grow.

And as adults, we have a similar structure in the Church. It's a place where we come to figure out our place in the world beyond our working lives and bringing home a paycheck to keep us housed and fed. What we do in our daily lives matters. Our personal interactions do not go unnoticed. And we need a place to come and continue to learn how to navigate the world in one-on-one and group interactions in many settings and contexts, because we ARE in adulthood. What we learn at church can be talked about with parents, peers, and others so that we can ALL learn and grow.

This year we are dedicating ourselves to a new theme of service and outreach: The Bridge Initiative, which has focused the Youth Group on developing a keen awareness of how there are people in our world that are left out. And we have immersed them in experiences to understand that, even as kids, they are not powerless to help. But we now need to take that further into each and all of our souls and our lives as adults. So that we can learn and grow. And we can take our message through our thoughts, words, and deeds, that we are bridges to lives of dignity and wholeness here in Townsend. For our faith community and for those that encounter us as followers of Christ, we embody the spirit of the Bridge Initiative: Let No One Stand Alone.

We're doing that already through new ecumenical outreach beyond TEO. We are providing mental health services at low-or no-cost for those residents of Townsend who need it. We have started a wonderful new meals ministry in conjunction with the other churches in town that lets folks have a hot meal each Wednesday during the Church year at each of Townsend's Churches (our community supper is the third Wednesday of each month). And we practice inclusion of all God's children, from every race, gender identity, sexual orientation, faith tradition, national origin, and creed in our worship and all that we do.

But we still need to go to school. We still need to learn more about how to navigate the world. Let's remember the three things God provides us: time, relationships, and bodies in which to live out the first two. The rest is up to us. So our focus in the bridge initiative will be a series of sermons and studies that is part of the wider United Church of Christ called Three Great Loves: How the Church loves its children, its neighbors, and the world.

So I'd like to invite each of you to come back to school, and see how our church loves its children as the starting point of our Bridge Initiative study and outreach, and better understand how we can get involved so that no child stands alone. I don't know if it's the most important work we have undertaken

to date in our almost 300 year history here in Townsend. But it's definitely important right here, right now.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Mark