

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 18, 2017 – Fathers' Day
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Romans 5:1-8

For Reflection

"Sherman made the terrible discovery that men make about their fathers sooner or later that the man before him was not an aging father but a boy, a boy much like himself, a boy who grew up and had a child of his own and, as best he could, out of a sense of duty and, perhaps love, adopted a role called 'Being a Father' so that his child would have something mythical and infinitely important: a Protector, who would keep a lid on all the chaotic and catastrophic possibilities of life."

~ Thomas Kennerly Wolfe Jr. (b.1931) American author and journalist
from The Bonfire of the Vanities (1987)

Producing Character

3...**suffering** produces endurance,
4 and **endurance** produces character,
and **character** produces **hope**...

Endurance, character, hope...these three...but the greatest of these...
(Oops, wrong text.)

Endurance, character, hope... these are the virtues of our time – but not only OUR time. These are the virtues of ALL times.

There has yet to be a world without suffering. And lucky for us, there have always been those who endured. And **those who have endured** did so because of their response to their suffering – their **strength of character** – and their ability to find and cling to and build on **hope**.

This week a Republican Congressman, Steve Scalise, was shot in the hip by a Bernie Sanders supporter in what could have been a massacre. Three others were also shot. The news didn't cover the three others much for a few days – I had to dig for names.

Crystal Griner and David Bailey, Capitol Police officers, were two special agents on Scalise's security detail who helped take down shooter John Hodgkinson.
Zack Barth, a legislative correspondent to Texas Rep. Roger Williams, was also shot.

The real story here has to do with character. **fusion.kinja.com**, a website dedicated to giving a platform to under-represented voices, ran this story about the incident:

Bigoted Homophobe Steve Scalise's Life Was Saved by a Queer Black Woman

Steve Scalise, the House Majority Whip who was shot by a gunman who attacked a congressional baseball practice on Wednesday, **has kept company with racists**...Following Scalise's shooting, [David] Duke [head of the KKK] praised him for "defending white civil rights."

Scalise has also been described as one of the most anti-LGBTQ politicians in Washington...

So, it is a point of especially delicious irony that Scalise, who survived the attack ... may owe his life to a queer black woman.

Crystal Griner...was one of two special agents on Scalise's security detail...who helped take down shooter John Hodgkinson. People at the scene said that the two officers prevented an all-out "massacre" on the field that day...

Griner sustained wounds in the [fire] fight, and she, like Scalise, was in a hospital recovering last night. **By her side was her wife, Tiffany.**

http://fusion.kinja.com/bigoted-homophobe-steve-scalises-life-was-saved-by-a-queer-black-woman-1796135276?utm_campaign=socialflow_fusion_facebook&utm_source=fusion_facebook&utm_medium=socialflow

We heard all about the bravery of Scalise and how an attack on one congressman is an attack on all of them. We heard that President 45 visited him in the hospital and Melania brought flowers to his wife. There was NO report of flowers being brought to Crystal's wife, Tiffany.

Now you tell me: what person in this scenario has proven to have the finest character?

Meanwhile, D.C. journalists from The Hill reported two days ago that:

The Department of Commerce has removed its mention of **gender identity and sexual orientation** from its equal opportunity employment statement...

The new statement was uploaded to the website sometime within the last ten days...

<http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/338044-commerce-department-removes-gender-and-sexual-orientation-from-eeo>

Irony with a more bitter flavor.

3...**suffering** produces endurance,
4 and **endurance** produces character,
and **character** produces **hope**...

My father is a person who has taken such biblical declarations to heart. This is why he now has multiple children who are characters. We spent our childhoods going to every national monument and Indian ruin in the continental United States – crossing the

country myriad times in the back of a tiny camper with a large dog and the dubious company of our siblings and occasionally an AFS student.

We backpacked in the Cascade Mountains, camped near rock falls and unpredictable stream beds, ate bugs with dinner, went months without a shower. We climbed cliffside dwellings on ladders that were 1000 years old and were poised above precipices 1000 miles deep. He took us to anti-war demonstrations and human rights demonstrations – which led to at least one of us being tear-gassed and at least one of us getting arrested.

My dad made us live in Orange County for four years in the 1960's. If that's not suffering, I don't know what is. We endured hate calls, death threats, burning crosses and the loss of an adopted brother of color. That produced some character.

He made us boycott grapes – a gastronomic sacrifice for fruit-loving children. And I won't EVEN go into the sufferings he (not to mention life in general) imposed on us after we left home...

But I will admit that I wouldn't change any of it – okay, MOST of it – for the world.

For the most part, we all grew stronger because of our exposure to a world that wasn't perfect – because of the things we couldn't have – because of the example of our father who endured – and taught us that life isn't fair – that our response to life was what mattered most. (Therapy has also helped.)

Because of my dad (and my mom) I can see the irony in a racist, homophobe politician having his life saved by a black lesbian cop. And it gives me hope.

Because of my dad I have some knowledge and respect for Native Americans and their capacity for endurance and hope. And I can celebrate that the U.S. court system is finally giving relief to the tribes at Standing Rock protecting our water.

Because of my dad I can be a member of a multi-racial family and flourish and celebrate and respond with some amount of equilibrium to everything that happens in the wake of our imperfect and loving and real interactions.

Would anyone like to share a story about someone who fathered you – who introduced you to suffering – taught you about endurance and hope – and made you the amazing character you are today?

Thank G-d for those who fathered us –
who exposed us to real life while they could still protect us –
who taught us that suffering is an opportunity to learn something –

who showed us how to persevere and respond to pain with strength and compassion and a sense of humor –
who put up with their kids' teasing and disrespect and ignorance and refusal to listen to hard-won parental advice –
who made mistakes and owned up to them and went on to be even better parents.

Thank G-d for those who showed up to father us.

Thank G-d for men of character who loved us into adulthood and beyond.

Thank G-d for the hope they have inspired in us which will see us through these days.

Children's Time It's So Nice to Have a Wolf Around the House by Harry Allard

Scripture Reading for Sunday June 18, 2017 – Pentecost 2 – Year A

Romans 5:1-8

1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that **suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.** 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.