

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

A family was attending the county fair. They were enjoying all of the activities around them. As they were walking along, the youngest member of the family was separated from them in the crowds. Upon realizing what had happened, the family began looking for the lost child. The child in turn, knowing that he was separated from his family began to look for them. As the family was searching for the lost child they prayed that they would find him. When they found the lost child, the child was anxious but glad to be found. The child's parents told him that they prayed that he would be okay and that they would find him in the crowds. After the parents shared this with the child, he was okay and was ready to go and see more of the events of the fair.

This is a story that has stuck in my mind since I heard it. The child was the one that shared this story with me. It's a story that demonstrates to us that Faith is caught more than it is taught.

The child knew that his parents prayed for him and was relieved. He knew that his parents prayed for him before the moment that he was lost and finding out that they prayed when he was lost brought him comfort. The power of knowing and seeing his parents sharing their faith through prayer was powerful.

Faith is caught more than it is taught. This is my favorite of the five principles of faith formation. It's my favorite mainly in part because I like to integrate what I've learned from a class or from a book into my daily living. For me, seeing faith or a lesson in action helps to answer the question, what does this mean in my life now? However, catching the faith doesn't replace teaching it. They work together.

The things that we say and do to each other have an impact on our lives. Children, youth, and adults learn from each other both by teaching and catching.

A wonderful passage that drives this point home is found in the 6th chapter of Deuteronomy. This passage is known as the Shema and it describes a way of passing on the faith through our home and daily life experiences:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

The Shema reminds us that faith is grounded in our lives. It is taught and caught in our homes, in public places, when we are lying down or standing, really anywhere. Faith is caught as the words of the Shema are recited to children, no matter where they are.

Today’s Bible lessons also give examples of how faith is caught more than it is taught. In the text from Joshua the Israelites were able to catch the faith when they could eat the produce from the land after 40 years in the wilderness. They no longer had to eat manna to survive. The Israelites finally saw the fulfillment of God’s promise and the end of their humiliation at the hands of others. Faith was caught in the realization that God keeps his promises.

Psalm 32 is a psalm of healing. Faith is caught in moments of healing. In times when we struggle or are sick or are suffering our faith shines through to help us and others. Healing in mind, body, and spirit are caught by others. Someone who is in pain that shares a smile and is thankful for everyday that they have shares their faith with others.

Paul writes about reconciliation to the Corinthians. We are ambassadors for Christ. God has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. Reconciliation that is something that is

taught to us and caught by others. In 2 Corinthians 5, we are taught to share the reconciliation through Christ that we have received with others because we are ambassadors. When we do this we catch the faith by sharing the reconciliation that we have received from God. We pass what we have been taught to others.

Finally, our gospel text for today, the parable of the prodigal son is a wonderful example of how faith is caught more than it is taught. The younger son takes his inheritance, goes away, spends it, and realizes that he's done a foolish thing. He decides that being a hired hand to his father would be a much better life than the one he was living. So he swallowed his pride and headed home and told his father he was unworthy to be called his son.

The father's response was out of compassion. His son who he thought he lost forever was standing in front of him. The father gave his son the best robe, rings, sandals, and a party. The younger son learned of his father's mercy that day. He was reconciled to his father.

Now to the older son...The older son upon hearing what was happening for his younger brother was angry and refused to celebrate. He did not understand his father's act of compassion and mercy. He was jealous that his brother received the celebration when he left them. The older brother had trouble seeing beyond the fact that he stayed and worked and obeyed his father. The older son had been taught the faith, but hadn't caught the power of new life in God through his father's acts of compassion and mercy.

We are taught by this parable to show mercy and compassion because God has shown us mercy and compassion. When we do this we experience God's love through the action being done. As we show others mercy faith can be caught and taught.

All of these texts and many others from the Bible point to how faith is caught more than it is taught. Our actions can speak louder than words. We are ambassadors for God, sharing the love of God through our words and actions. Faith is taught and caught, and we are all teachers and examples for each other.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.