

***Based on Exodus 20:6***

*Showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation*

In the past couple of weeks, more than one of you has shared with me that the SPC History Project, with its unveiling of our pro-slavery heritage, has shaken your sense of enthusiasm when it comes to defining this church we love so much.

*We're supposed to be the GOOD church, several of you have remarked. We Choose Welcome, that is our brand. We have a Black Lives Matter sign in the courtyard and a Progress PRIDE flag hanging on the side of our building.*

*I just don't know where to go with this truth-telling about slavery, some of you have mourned. It's like the church I thought we were is gone, but I don't yet know how to be the church that we really are.*

And it is true. The SPC History Project is forcing us, as a congregation, to reckon with the cognitive dissonance between who we say we want to be and who we really are and have been. Not just then, but also now.

We DO choose welcome, as our sign declares, and yet there will always be someone somewhere who does not actually feel welcome in this place. We DO commit to being and becoming people of radical compassion, and yet there will always come a day when we are grumpy and whiny and sure of our way and all others can take the highway. We DO root ourselves in the way of Jesus while enriching our spiritual formation from all sources, and yet there will always be a word of wisdom from Jesus or some other sage that we fail to heed or just plain don't want to.

Not because we are a bad church, but because we are a human church. Like every other church. Which I know may feel like heresy to admit. We pride ourselves on being better than all of those other churches.

But the truth is, our welcome sign and our PRIDE flag and our Statement of Identity and our Expression of Commitments are aspirational, not universal. These things describe who we say we want to be when we are at our best, and who we remind ourselves we need to be when we are at our worst. And yes, the SPC History Project reveals ourselves at our worst.

For generations our ancestors violated the First Commandment in ugly and violent ways, forgetting over and over again that the God we say we worship is a liberating God, who leads the people *out* of slavery, not into it. For generations our ancestors violated the Second Commandment in their idolatry. And there have been consequences!

The first step toward healing these generational consequences is exactly what we are doing in the SPC History Project. The first step is simply tell the truth. To remember. Which, as our Lesson reminds us, is the first step

toward forming a community out of the wilderness where all are fed and all is healed and generations to come may live in peace and prosperity.

Remember the liberating God, our Lesson reminds us, who leads people *out* of slavery, not into it. Do not even think about worshiping a different kind of God.

Forsake idolatry, our Lesson reminds us, in our temptation to worship wealth or power or prestige or vanity - or even the self-image of our beloved church. At the end of the day, it is actually *God* who chooses welcome and commits to compassion and speaks a word of wisdom through all times and places and peoples. We are simply doing those things, in our own fallible way, because we worship the God who is doing those things in an infallible way.

Perhaps a side benefit of the SPC History Project is its invitation to humility for our congregation today. Yes, the church we thought we were is gone. No, we don't yet know how to be the church that we really are. And that can be a good thing! Pride does goeth before the fall, after all.

But from a heart of humility instead of pride, our work becomes an offering of prayer, a covenant to break the cycles of generational trauma, a decision to place our flag upon newfound land declaring, *this ends with us*, and a trust that God is working overtime through all time to redeem the worst that is in us and to cultivate the best. And we are not starting from scratch!

Because the humble truth is we are *not* today the congregation we were two hundred years ago, flagrantly violating the First and Second Commandment. We *do* choose welcome and compassion and wisdom, even with - and in fact, perhaps *because of* our flaws - and we will continue to do so.

The humble truth is that the steadfast love of God has *already* led us this far by faith. And as we continue to tell the truth, with humility, the steadfast love of God will *continue* to heal us of this generational trauma ... to the thousandth generation.