

What's New and What's Old
A Sermon by the Pastoral Staff
Fairmount Presbyterian Church
Cleveland Heights, Ohio
7 September 2008
Text: Matthew 13:44-53

LOUISE: Jesus was a teacher. Though the Church has come to call him Lord and Savior, the gospel witness to his earthly life describes a teacher of uncommon wisdom and spirit, whose lessons about the Kingdom of God felt compelling and authoritative. He taught with stories, peppered with memorable images and humor. The gospel reading for today illustrates the way Jesus used the earthly and ordinary to reveal something of the heavenly and extraordinary. Here, at the opening of our 93rd program year, we are reminded to keep learning because the most important things may lie hidden right under our noses. Listen for God's Word to the Church in the reading from the gospel according to Matthew, in the thirteenth chapter, at the 44th verse: [Matthew 13:44-53]

Louise reads text from the lectern. Dick stands in pulpit. Anita and Kurt are seated with the congregation. Missy and Eric, both with wireless mikes, walk down center aisle]

MISSY: So here we are, on the first Sunday of a new season. I love the beginning of our program year, even while I wonder what it will bring to Fairmount.

ERIC: Well, right away I can see it's brought more people! I'd just about learned the names of the summer crowd, but I can see I've got more work to do!

MISSY: Thank goodness for the new name badges. Wearing them will help us connect with one another, by avoiding the awkwardness of forgetting a person's name, and by reinforcing each one's name visually. Knowing a person's name helps remove a barrier that might keep us from getting to know the wonderful person who bears it.

ERIC: Even children from first grade on enjoy wearing them! If you didn't find a name badge this morning with YOUR name on it, just stop by the information table in Andersen Hall at coffee hour and request one—it will be ready next Sunday!

[Arrive in chancel about now. Stand in front of communion table]

LOUISE: Eric, it's great to have you on board! Your new position was developed from our staff development task force as part of an "ideal staffing plan" for Fairmount's growth and strength. It focuses on Christian education across an entire lifespan, and ministries that nurture faith and spiritual understanding. In your position you will directly supervise the work of our 3 part-time directors of Children and Family Ministries, Youth, and 20s/30s. What are your thoughts about it so far?

ERIC: This church has many programs, classes, small groups, and learning opportunities. But I wonder how accessible they are to many in the congregation—does the typical member understand how participating in a Bible study or discussion group can deepen your relationship with God? Today's busy families have so many competing demands, we want to make the value of these learning opportunities very clear! As a husband and father of three young children, I appreciate the challenges of fitting one more thing in. Yet, I strongly believe it's crucial that we assist families in addressing their particular spiritual needs.

LOUISE: In your new position, you'll certainly lead this church's efforts to do so---for families with young children, for youth, and for Fairmount's fastest-growing group: people in their 20s and 30s. That's consistent with this congregation's history—you know it was originally founded by a group of dedicated women as a Sunday School for children.

ERIC: But it's important to remember that Christian faith calls us to life-long learning. We never graduate from the School of Discipleship. [HERE IS YOUR CHANCE TO SHARE YOUR

THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION, ILLUSTRATED WITH EXAMPLES FOR YOUTH AND 20s/30s. AT SOME POINT INTRODUCE KURT AND SAY SOMETHING ABOUT CONFIRMATION. . AT SOME POINT INTRODUCE ANITA AND SAY SOMETHING ABOUT CHILDREN'S MINISTRY]

LOUISE: It's a new day at Fairmount!

DICK *[coughing to make your presence known]* Well, I think we're getting a picture of what's NEW. But don't forget about the OLD!

LOUISE: You're not old, Dick! You're "chronologically enhanced." And I'm surely glad to see you're still here!

DICK: I'm the senior staff person now, and will continue to be a "towering" presence around here. I coordinate the Men's Breakfast Forum, and invite all men to join us on the first and third Wednesdays at 7:30 for coffee and bagels and lively discussions on a whole host of topics the group chooses.

LOUISE: Uh, Dick, that's 7:30 AM??

DICK: That's why it's called Men's **Breakfast** Forum! You can enjoy food and fellowship and still get to work on time. I'd love to see many of you men join us. I'm also the staff person for "Beyond Acceptance," a group for persons with a family member who is gay or lesbian. And I work with the adult education area of the Faith Formation Council to provide Bible studies, topical classes and theological and social issue discussions that will engage our minds and our spirits. [SAY ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE ABOUT YOUR THEOLOGY OF LEARNING]

MISSY: Christian education is carried out in a community of caring, where you can trust you'll be supported in all the changes and transitions of life. Member care at Fairmount focuses on helping us minister to one another. [HERE GIVE EXAMPLES OF THIS, INCLUDING JUDSON WORSHIP, DEACON

VISITS, PRAYER SHAWLS, WELL-SPOUSE, AND ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SAY ABOUT CONGREGATIONAL CARE]

LOUISE: Our minister of music, Bob Moncrief, leads an outstanding music ministry including the Fairmount Choir, cantata and jubilate choirs for children and youth, and our bell choirs under the nimble direction of Amy Carlson. The Fairmount Music Series offers wide-ranging musical delights. We'll be dedicating the new chapel organ on October 5, a gift made possible through the generosity of Dick and Maurine Ruggles, and many other Fairmounters. Music plays a significant role in renewing faith and inspiring worship. Let's here a witness about it from Elder Kit Leihgeber.

[WITNESS BY KIT]

LOUISE: A hymn commissioned by Fairmount for its 70th anniversary praises the God of grace who is faithful to all generations. Both the old and the new -tradition AND change-are important ingredients for a thriving church. Please join in singing "Lord, We Come to Celebrate Your Name," rising as able.

[THE FAIRMOUNT HYMN]

LOUISE: Fairmount has a proud history of community involvement. We have always understood ourselves to belong to the metropolitan Cleveland region, without artificial distinctions between city and suburb, and viewing the health of each part to be part of our responsibility to the larger community. Notice how this commitment is depicted in the Te Deum window —there's Pastor Frank Ferris standing on the front steps of the church, framed by Fairmount's steeple and leafy oak trees, with the Cleveland skyline in the background. We were the first suburban church to become racially integrated—in 1964—and have continued to grow in our appreciation for diversity. We have built homes with Habitat for Humanity, tutored urban school children at Anton Grdina Elementary School and E-Prep School. We provide space for Open Doors afterschool program, and were the founding congregation of heights Youth Club, the first suburban

Cleveland Boys & Girls Club. The Outreach Ministry Council has helped us address some of the underlying systemic causes of injustice in the wider community. Many Fairmounters serve on boards of civic and charitable organizations, working to improve our city's economic vitality and opportunities for all its citizens.

Now we want to draw the congregation into the planning and execution of a vision for Fairmount's role in the city, and to use that process to develop concrete plans that will guide our work. We want to build the capacity of city dwellers toward self-development and focus energies on effective projects with the most impact. We want to throw our moral weight behind efforts to encourage a regional perspective. We believe this initiative will help Fairmount members sense God's call to care for the city, and will increase a sense of connection through service and fellowship.

MISSY: ADD TO CHURCH IN CITY BY LINKING IT WITH URBAN CHURCH WORK YOU'RE DOING/SOME STUFF FROM YOUR FAITH JOURNEY SERMON.

LOUISE: Make no mistake about it friends: there is more to life than meets the eye. More to this world than just this world. More to this church than its array of programs, ministries, and classes. *God is here.* The kingdom of heaven is present, and the church participates in its building as we testify to the rich tradition of the past, and declare its truth for a new day. We borrow from that history, and claim it for each succeeding generation; we bring out of the treasure God has given us, what is new and what is old. Because we Ohioans are so familiar with orange barrels, we might say the church's job is to put up the signs saying "God at work." God knows the highways of human life deteriorate; they can be rough and pot-hole-ridden. But this world is also a construction zone for the kingdom of God, and if we look, we will surely find it.

NOW TO THE ONE WHO BY THE POWER AT WORK WITHIN US AS ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH FAR MORE ABUNDANTLY THAN ALL

WE ASK OR IMAGINE, TO GOD BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH TO ALL GENERATIONS, FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.

I invite you to affirm Fairmount's mission and diversity statements, rising as able.

The Rev. Louise F. Westfall, D.Min., Pastor

The Rev. Richard D. Clewell, D.Min., Pastor

The Rev. Martha (Missy) Shiverick , M.D.V., M.S.

The Rev. Eric Dillenbeck, M.D.V.