

Telling Our Stories

November 20, 2011

WHY FIRST CHURCH IS IMPORTANT TO ME

Why is First Church important to me? Before I answer that, let me tell you how I got here.

In college during the early 1950s, I sang in the chapel choir. There, due to the presence of the divinity school, I heard some of the great mid-twentieth century theologians including Paul Tillich, the brothers Niebuhr and Harry Emerson Fosdick. Also, due to the presence of the music school, I heard and sang some of the world's great religious choral music. I began to realize that while THEOLOGY stimulated my MIND, MUSIC made my soul SOAR!

Fast forward through the next 25 years. I met and married Carla. We raised two sons, Rick and Phil. A job change brought us to Simsbury in 1960. Long hours at work with nights, weekends, swinging shifts and business travel, plus picking up several advanced degrees at night, left me with no time or energy for church. Then, in the late 1970s, a friend, Joyce Kalika, mentioned that the choir here at First was presenting the Faure *Requiem* as a Music Sunday service. Would I come? Yes. I sat in that upper balcony. I had sung the *Requiem* before, and as I listened, I replayed it in my mind. Someone in the choir must have noticed my concentration, because soon afterwards I received and accepted an invitation to join the choir. That's how I came here. Not long afterward, Lyman Potter cornered me at a Kalika holiday party and (ahem) gently suggested that now might be time for us to join First Church. We did, and I have never looked back.

What have I learned here? I came to realize that life is full of UNCERTAINTIES. Unlike the certainties of death and taxes, human behavior can be very unpredictable. Is this FREE WILL? If yes, I now believe that God rules us with a

very light hand. That means we can fail both individually and collectively, and when we do, in Bill Coffin's words, God is the first to mourn for us.

My faith has its own uncertainties. We cannot know the mind of God. On one hand, I can imagine a God so vast who established the whole universe and got it up and running. Yet on the other hand, God is so available to us to love, strengthen and forgive us when we open ourselves to him. Yet his instructions to us are simple and direct, *Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself*. How do we do that?

Through the eyes and minds of our astronauts, I have seen the Earth from space. The boundaries between countries that divide us are human constructs that are not visible from orbit. Worldwide, we are one people. Yet our regional cultures, which have developed in part to cope with local environments, have caused us to have different world views. And conflicts over these can now threaten human existence. Can we learn to respect our differences and still work together to sustain human life on earth? Or can God afford to let us fail? Did God place all eggs in just one basket: us? Or would other intelligent life on some distant and perhaps yet-undiscovered planet fill our role if we fail?

Here at First Church, I learned that uncertainty about faith is not only OK, but that questioning my faith is essential in developing a deeper faith. I am learning how to respect my neighbors while recognizing our differences. I am also learning how to reach out in helpful ways. And I am seeing that by working together, we can accomplish greater things than we could ever do by ourselves. And while not everything goes right for me, I can get through the bad times. In a nutshell, I have learned to TRUST God, and I CAN LIVE WITH UNCERTAINTY. This I have learned at First Church. That is why I am here.

- R.C. ("Dick") Wilde