

Column

Robert Fulghum's book "All I Really Need to Know I learned in Kindergarten" became a bestseller in 1986 and recently has been republished. No doubt its success is partially due to its catchy title. Just hearing it gets people's heads a-nodding.

Sharing, being considerate, cleaning up after yourself and learning to balance work and play – those things learned in kindergarten -- are important lessons. Without them, you cannot hope to be a success in life.

In my case, I did not have the privilege of attending kindergarten. I went straight into first grade at the tender age of five. Hence, the skills I just mentioned had to be learned elsewhere, chiefly in Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and birthday parties.

What set me to thinking about Fulghum's book is the Sunny D Children Theatre Camp held each year in Blue Ridge. What is true of kindergarten is also true of this camp. For two weeks in June, parents leave off their children at St. Luke's Church for breakfast. The first person they encounter is "Mr. Jere" (McConnell) who is seated on the church porch. From him each receives a cheery greeting setting the tone for the day. Even the most sleep-deprived child or adult finds a smile coming on his or her face.

Encouragement, affirmation and the appropriate use of humour are all life skills. One may be not be able to change one's situation, but one can change one's mental attitude. Often that is all it takes to make the difference between a miserable and memorable day.

Once downstairs, Sunny D students learn and practice other life skills such as greeting one another, saying please and thank you and holding face-to-face conversations (almost a lost art in today's world). Come to think of it, I don't remember seeing a single person staring down at a mobile phone or other electronic device.

After finishing breakfast, each child scrapes his plate and returns it to the kitchen, most saying "thank you" as they do. Learning to pick up after yourself and being neat will certainly stand you in good stead for work and marriage.

Then, under the supervision of an adult, they walk over the road to the Blue Ridge Kiwanis Club Community Centre for classes. Safe practices like looking both ways when you cross a street and keeping an eye on others to make sure they are safe are likewise good practices.

Once in camp, more skills are learned and reinforced. One of the most important is learning that you are not the centre of the universe. Mutual respect, courtesy and learning to be a part of a team will take a person far in life.

Finally, they learn that life is not something to be viewed as on television but something to be entered into. We are all actors on the stage of life, each with an important part to play. When we play our part well, we contribute to the wellbeing and happiness of others.

Nothing I have said thus far has anything to do with religion as normally conceived. Yet, upon reflection, it does. The God we meet in Jesus walks the streets of the real world, interacts with people in all walks of life and calls us to be a part of a team (the Church). Whatever is praiseworthy and contributes to human flourishing comes from Him.

St. Paul perhaps said it best when he wrote: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest [honourable], whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

If a boy or girl learns nothing more than this from kindergarten or Sunny D, he or she is well on the way to being equipped for life.

ALMIGHTY God, heavenly Father, who hast blessed us with the joy and care of children; Give us light and strength so to train them, that they may love whatsoever things are true and pure and lovely and of good report, following the example of their Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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