

(2nd Sunday after Pentecost)

The Psalmist, Dr. Seuss and God

Psalm 117

"O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; God's steadfast love endures forever!"

"Horton Hatches the Egg"

"I meant what I said and I said what I meant. An elephant's faithful one-hundred percent!"

What does the typical American family look like to you? Generally, when we speak of the "typical" American family, we might think it consists of a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and the children. At least that has been the image of a traditional family developed in the American mindset since the 1950s.

In her book, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, Stephanie Coontz says: **"Contrary to popular belief, 'Leave It To Beaver' was not a documentary."**

Her point being that the idea of a "traditional" family really did not exist in America until the 1950s, and even then, it was short lived.

So why do we think of the ideal family being a working dad, a stay-at-home mom, and several children? Television shows like "Leave It To Beaver" and "Ozzie and Harriet" which burned the image into our cultural worldview.

Stephanie Coontz adds: **"Like most visions of a 'golden age', the 'traditional family' evaporates on closer examination. It is an ahistorical amalgam of structures, values, and behaviors that never coexisted in the same time and place."**

According to *The Mother Company*, a website dedicate to the family, what was a more "traditional" family, especially before the 1920s, **"has been the custom of having a family labor force — either with the wife as co-provider or the children, and often both."**

They noted that **"It was not until the 1920s that a bare majority of kids grew up in a family where the mother was not working on the farm or in a small business, and where the children were in school instead of in the workforce. That family form receded in the Depression and World War II and came roaring back in the 1950s, largely due to a combination of discrimination against female workers and unprecedented rises in real wages for young men, as home prices fell in the postwar boom, wages rose, and government invested in new jobs, job training, and educational opportunities."**

As for the number of children in a family, according to the Pew Research Foundation, **before 1971**, the average was **four**. **After 1971**, the number averaged dropped to **two** children per household.

My parents had 5 children. Staci's parents had 4. We have one. How about your family?

Family size and make up does seem much different today. Some of that is due to the migration of Americans, moving from more rural, family farms and supporting agricultural businesses, to cities and the new "suburbs" for factory or white collar jobs. Because of this, extended families no longer live in the same community or even state.

If we are honest with ourselves, there is no real "traditional" America family.

A family can indeed be a mother and father with children. It could also be a family with two mothers or two fathers raising their children. A family is also a single mother raising her children or it can be a single father doing the same.

Which brings us to Dr. Seuss and his beloved elephant, Horton. As I mentioned last week, Theodor Geisel and his wife were unable to have children of their own. They learned this in 1931, which was the same year he published his first children's book.

In 1940, he wrote "**Horton Hatches the Egg**". Horton and the bird, Mayzie, offer us a mixture of images and feelings around what would have been consider the "traditional" American family of the '40s: working father, a stay-at-home mom raising the children.

But Dr. Seuss presents us with a radically different image of family. Mayzie is a single parent. The biological father is not in the picture. She needs a break. Enter Horton, a single male, who happens by, and is asked to take an active role in raising Mayzie's child, by sitting on the nest.

It should be noted here, that Horton isn't even the same species! He is the non-biological, adoptive father, helping to raise a child/egg, that was born out of wedlock!

We may not think much about this today, but in 1940, that image was a bit controversial. So Horton becomes the adoptive parent to Mayzie's baby egg; tenderly caring for it, protecting it against all kinds of dangers from the weather to the hunters, who make Horton and the egg, refugees, forcing them from their homeland, and selling them to the circus!

Throughout his story, Dr. Seuss has Horton repeating a phrase that echoes the words of the Psalmist in relation to God.

Horton, through all he faces, says: **"I meant what I said and I said what I meant. An elephant's faithful one-hundred percent!"**

In a similar way, the Psalmist likewise says: **“For great is God’s steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.”**

The connection here is the theological idea of **“a steadfast, faithful, unconditional love”** by which a parent promises to never abandon his children.

Mayzie’s little, vulnerable egg had a future because Horton, the non-biological, non-traditional, single father stepped in to love and care for that egg.

In a similar way, we believe that God, as our Creator, our Divine Parent, cares for us as children; loving us, nurturing us, abiding with us throughout our lives, even when life gets rough, and dangers surround us. God covenants and promises to be faithful to us, loving us unconditionally.

James L. Mays, Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, says: **“The steadfast love (hesed) and faithfulness (‘emet) of the Lord are the vocabulary with which the people of God speak about the salvation of the past and the hope for the future. In his way with us, God’s fidelity to his covenant with us has prevailed over our frailty and failure.”**

Friends, we have a hope for a future where war and violence, suffering, pain, sorrow and death will be no more, and people will leave in peace together, because of God’s love for us, and that love is unconditional and everlasting. We believe God’s promise, living into this promised new day, because like Horton, God: **“...meant what God said and He said what He meant. I am your God, faithful one-hundred percent!”**