

**The Rev. Robert B. Macfarlane, Interim Minister
Congregational Church of Hollis, NH, UCC
Fathers' Day Sunday - June 15, 2014**

“Carpe Diem”

Psalm 118

“This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it!”

Prayer Before Sermon

O God who gave the Word of life, bless our words, our meditations, and our prayers, that in hearing we may respond, and in responding we may know of Your love for us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Carpe Diem

I am still amazed that some of our School Systems continue to teach Latin. Latin was one of the most enjoyable courses I remember taking in High School. In those days, first year was learning the language itself; second year was reading Caesar; and the third year was reading Cicero. I liked Caesar, but I LOVED Cicero. And to this day, I hold fond memories of my Latin Teacher, Mrs. Keenan. But I hung up my toga long ago, and only a few choice phrases remain.

One of those is “Carpe Diem,” which as many of you know, translates, “SEIZE THE DAY.” Grab Hold! Hold on tight! Take hold with a tight grip and don't let go! Now some of you may also know the movie starring Robin Williams, entitled “Dead Poets Society,” in which “Carpe Diem” was very prominent. It so happens that the movie became our family's VERY FAVORITE MOVIE, and to this day, our family can say “Carpe Diem” or “Seize the Day,” and a whole flood of cherished memories flow over us - Mom & Dad, Duncan & Andrew.

“Dead Poets Society” was released 25 years ago in 1989, and was a movie of young boys growing up in a prep school, and taught by a Professor played by Robin Williams, whose problem was that he didn't teach “by the book,” but rather spoke to the deep, inner needs and motivations of his students. He taught them to seize the day, as it were; to seize each moment to learn all there was to soak up, and to trust their inner judgment and intuition. And yes, to be all they could be.

That didn't set well with the Prep School's “old school” leadership, and so this favorite of all teachers was dismissed from his position, much to the complete disappointment – and disillusionment - of his students.

The kind of hopes and dreams that were kindled in those students, were just the kind of hopes and dreams Diana and I, as parents, had for our own two teenage boys. Robin Williams' character of Mr. Keating, was EXACTLY the kind of teacher we yearned for our kids to have in school. And so many memories abound, on such days as Fathers' Day Sunday, when we recall earlier days of camping trips and baseball games, and swimming at the beach with Grammy & Grampy on Cape Cod.

I'm sure Fathers' Day brings such memories to your consciousness as well. And so just like on Mothers' Day, we know that while some of us may be neither a Father nor a Mother, we each HAVE a Father and a Mother. So we hold close their memories, as they in their day, taught US, in their own way, to “seize the day,” and to be the very best son or daughter that we ourselves might one day become.

Scripture has its own way of telling us that we should seize the day. The 118th Psalm, which we read responsively, begins with words we all know so well: ***“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures - how long? Yes, for EVER!”*** And then the Psalmist concludes with words even MORE familiar, and which you hear me say each and every Sunday morning as I greet you: ***“This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it!”*** “Seize this day,” says the Lord, “rejoice and be glad!” I don’t know the Hebrew translation, so “Carpe Diem” will have to suffice.

And not only does the Psalmist remind us to take hold of each day as it comes to us with all the gusto we can muster. Jesus ALSO was one who lived all 24 hours of each and every day, filled with listening and teaching, overflowing with modeling and coaching, brimming with healing and feeding and confidence building with his disciples, and those who followed him the length and breadth of Palestine.

Jesus was doing with his disciples, what parents do - or ought to be doing – with their own children: listening and teaching, modeling and coaching, healing and feeding and instilling confidence in the girls and boys who would become the next generation.

And Jesus too, has a parallel with Professor Keating. For Jesus, you see, didn’t “go by the book” either! He got into trouble when he said he came to TRANSFORM the Law of the Old Testament; to RENEW it; and to introduce a NEW Commandment – that we should “love one another, as we love ourselves.” Mr. Keating felt the Poets of old should not be relegated to the scrap heap of history, but should be TRANSFORMATIVE in our lives. So too with Jesus – and thus our United Church of Christ believes that “God is still speaking” - not through a dead book full of dead poets, but a book alive and vital and energizing.

When I think of models of Fatherhood, two men often come to mind. The first one is JOSPEH, Jesus’ own father. I see him at his carpenter’s bench, hard at work as the master craftsman I envision him to have been, with the boy Jesus right beside him, watching his Dad’s hands fashion a chair or perhaps a stool or a chest of drawers. I see the young, impressionable Jesus digesting each and every word his father spoke, of the history of the Hebrew people, of living by what is right, rather than which is expedient, and of the nature of God the heavenly parent.

Yes, we need to be careful what we speak of in front of our children. They just may take to heart what we SAY, just as much as what we DO. Joseph must have been a wonderful Dad – all the marvelous things Hallmark says in the cards we send. I am quite sure, that Jesus gained great respect and deep understanding of who God is, by soaking in all that Joseph had to offer his remarkable son.

Besides Joseph, the other father I would lift up, would be ABRAHAM LINCOLN, our 16th President. You know the iconic picture! You can see it in your mind’s eye. It is of Lincoln in February of 1865, sitting at a chair with his beloved son Tad on his lap. And like any other father and son, they are holding a book, and are reading together. It is one of my most favorite of pictures, and I have always had a large print of it hanging in my study, throughout our boys’ growing up years.

Harried beyond measure by the Civil War raging outside the White House walls, with demands on his time like no other president in our history, this father Abraham took moments - literally SEIZED MOMENTS - to read to his son, and Matthew Brady captures the moment for all of history, and for what a father and child can mean to one another. “Carpe Diem” would have been an appropriate watchword for both Joseph and for Lincoln.

And it can be as well for each one of US, whether we have sons or daughters, children we teach or mentor, Scouts we take on campouts, or young people we are advisors for in our Youth Groups or in summer Church camps.

My own father died in 1988, 24 years ago, but I never step foot in the pulpit without putting on the onyx ring he always wore when he took my mother out for an evening. His books line my library, his WW II Army Uniform hangs in my closet, his oil paintings grace my walls, and his passion for justice infuses my ministry.

Some of you will remember what we did on Mothers' Day, as we created a sacred moment of remembrance, as we stated our Mother's name out loud, and recalled in our heart of hearts memories we hold dear. I suggest we do this now, speaking the first name of our own fathers, or the person in your life which most resembles what a father has meant for you in your life. We'll go around the sanctuary, and conclude with prayer.

My father's name was **ELTON**. And your father's name?

LET US PRAY

Yes, as we seize this day, we know that this is indeed the day, Lord, that you have made. And we rejoice, and we are glad. We give you grateful thanks for the memory of our fathers, and the models they were for us, or still, by the grace of God, may be. Hold them in your care, and bless them, in Jesus' holy and abiding name. Amen.

MORNING PRAYER - June 15, 2014

This is the day O Lord, that you have made, and we rejoice. You have created a beautiful world, and we give thanks for the summer's warmth and vitality, for student graduations and family vacations. And yet we know that so many of your people live in the gray of loneliness, or the darkness of loss, or the frustration of joblessness. Help us, we pray, to cherish your gifts, and to reach out in mission to those who have little.

O God, we remember those who have gone before us, and who have paved the way for us in our own journeys toward a new heaven and a new earth. Increase our faith, and deepen our commitments, that we also may find strength for the journey from this life, to life eternal.

And finally, we give grateful thanks for this congregation of Hollis on the Village Green, for its members full of variety and energy, for its leadership full of anticipation and hope, and for its missions and ministries full of dedication and promise.

Be with us as we continue in these Interim days, we pray for our Search Committee, that it may have the gift of discernment, making wise choices, in partnership with your Holy Spirit, that as pastor and people, this congregation may go from strength to strength, and meet the future with joy. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.