

June 21, 2026 “I Prefer the Vegetables.”

Some years back Marsha Topley asked me before Sunday School if I was doing Time for Young Disciples that morning. She had been in the sanctuary and there was an inflatable boat in front of the communion table. Marsha assumed that was the kind of mildly unhinged prop I would have for Time for Young Disciples. The boat had actually been brought by Larry Hicks, but Marsha’s assumption was fair.

Many of the things that I have done at church, like Time for Young Disciples, involve elementary kids, but, as many of you know, my day to day vocation for over 27 years is teaching high schoolers, the last 16.5 years at Mayfield, where I teach chemistry and am the science department head. One of the education things I can really geek out about is our science standards, the Next Generation Science Standards or NGSS. Education, like many fields, is overly fond of initialisms and NGSS has its own set. We talk about our PEs (Performance Expectations) being 3 dimensional. Those 3 dimensions are DCIs, SEPs, and CCCs. DCIs are Disciplinary Core Ideas, the science content which made up the bulk of the old standards. SEPs are Science and Engineering Practices, which is the way science (and engineering) is done. Unlike when we simply talked about THE scientific method in chapter one or two, the SEPs are wound throughout the way students learn science and teachers teach science. The final dimension, the CCCs, are the Crosscutting concepts, those big picture science ideas that cross disciplines. (One of my teaching buddies was irritated by the fact that there were three Cs since NGSS had crosscutting as one word.) The CCCs are:

- Patterns
- cause and effect
- scale, proportion, and quantity
- systems and system models
- energy and matter
- structure and function
- stability and change

So, for example, we talk about energy when we talk about food webs in life sciences, about bond energy in physical sciences, and how energy flows between earth systems in earth science.

I’m going to let you in on a secret: I have a set of CCCs for Time for Young Disciples too. But there aren’t 7; there are just four. Every one of my lessons is about at least one of these cross cutting concepts.

But let’s start by looking at the story of Hagar and Ishmael in today’s reading. It is not an easy read. When I was looking for hymns suggested for today’s lectionary readings I was more than a bit bothered by the fact that more than one hymn suggested (not by Beth) were about Abraham and Sarah, who are clearly not the center of this story and might even be described as the villains of this story.

If we go back to chapter 16 in Genesis we are told that Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham to conceive a child. When Hagar became pregnant, acrimony between her and Sarah

caused Hagar to flee into the wilderness, where the Angel of the Lord found her and told her to return to her mistress but also that her offspring would be too numerous to count. He gave a name to her coming son, Ishmael, **God hears**, “for the Lord has given heed to your affliction”.

At this well, Hagar names the Lord, **El-roi, the God who sees**.

Fast forward to today’s story. Not only was Ishmael born, but as we learned in last week’s passage, Sarah herself has become pregnant and now has born a son. And now the son born to the enslaved woman must be gone. I must admit that I find it a bit disturbing that Abraham was willing to send his son and his mother off into the wilderness with some bread and a skin of water.

But then God heard the voice of the boy. God heard the voice of the boy named God hears. The God who sees helps Hagar to see the water in front of her and reminds her of the promise made back at Beer-lahai-roi, the well of the living one who sees me, that a great nation will come from Ishmael.

What are the crosscutting concepts I see in this story? There are two. First, we have a God who sees us and hears us. This is not a disinterested deity, disconnected from humanity. This is a God who loves us and hears us in our pain and suffering. This is a God that has already provided a well for us to drink from.

Secondly, this is a God that has made us for a purpose. God may not be planning on making a great nation from us, but each one of us from the littlest kiddo in the nursery to the oldest saint was created by God on purpose. To be clear, our value is not in what we can do and what we can produce. In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.”

Let’s now shift to the passage from Romans. If we step back to chapter 5, we hear Paul talking about the grace of God in Christ Jesus—again the love of a God who sees and hears. Romans 5: 6-8 from the Message:

“Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn’t, and doesn’t, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn’t been so weak, we wouldn’t have known what to do anyway. We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.”

But Paul doesn’t leave it there. “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may increase? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?” Paul says that in our baptism we are baptized into the death of Jesus so that we can be raised with Him so that we might “walk in the newness of life.” We live new lives not to earn favor but because we have been transformed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This fourth crosscutting concept is a tricky one for kids. It is easy to turn following Jesus into a list of rules. And once we have a list of rules we all want to be able to check

all of the boxes - - or rebel. This is why this idea needs to follow the fact that God loved us first. We are responding and following, not earning favor.

Now if you are keeping track, you might have noticed that I have given numbers 1, 2, and 4 of my crosscutting concepts of Time for Young Disciples. What happened to 3?

Number 3 is all about you. Childhood is not only a period of physical development but also of mental development. Many of the abstract ideas of faith can only be accessed by children in early adolescence and later. So how do we teach them about God and God's love for them?

It's you. They see God and the love of God through you. God may be hard to imagine, but you know their names. They may not be able to see their creator, but you ask them how school is going and hear their stories at the table at Salt and Light. The sermon Amon preached was started years ago in the little chairs in Miss Judith and Miss Carol's classroom in Branigan, on paper that was not pink or purple. And every time I remind the kids that they are surrounded by people who love them, I am reminding y'all of your responsibility to them. As part of the baptism liturgy, we, the congregation, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture each child by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging her/him to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of his church.

And not only do our kids have learned about God's love from all of you, they learn what "walking in the newness of life" looks like in watching what they see you doing. As the hymn says,

*They lived not only in ages past;  
there are hundreds of thousands still.  
The world is bright with the joyous saints  
who love to do Jesus' will.  
You can meet them in school, on the street, in the store,  
in church, by the sea, in the house next door,  
they are saints of God whether rich or poor,  
and I mean to be one too.*

And then you give them opportunities to do service, like Alonzo as liturgist this morning. I still remember when Lyn Ames asked Amon, when Amon was probably about 7, to help him with fellowship. And Beth had to put a lot of trust in Caleb the first time she had him do snare for Do You Hear What I Hear.

So what are my 4 crosscutting concepts?

1. God loves you very much
2. God created you for a purpose
3. You are surrounded by people who love you because God loves all of us
4. We show God's love through our actions.

But what has this to do with vegetables? Back when my boys were in elementary school, after Time for Young Disciples the kids would go to the church library and watch

videos, mainly Bibleman and VeggieTales. The kids tended to have a strong preference for one or the other which made deciding difficult. One Sunday Alonzo Brewer, who was probably 4 or 5 at the time, looked at me with a very serious expression, and told me, "I prefer the vegetables." For those of you who are not familiar, VeggieTales uses animated vegetables (and sometimes fruits) to tell both Bible stories and stories that would illustrate an aspect of following Jesus. (Fun fact: there are almost no New Testament stories because Phil Vischer, the creator of Veggie Tales, promised his mother that he would never turn Jesus into a vegetable.) After the story, Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber sum up the lesson and give an appropriate Bible verse. At the end of every episode, either Bob or Larry or both will say, "God made you special and he loves you very much."

We have a God who hears and a God who sees.

Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.

I sing because I'm happy—  
I sing because I'm free—  
For His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches me.

God made you special and he loves you very much. Amen.