

3/29/20

Good Morning! Through the Lenten season, we have been following Scriptural passages based on Jill Duffield's book, Lent in Plain Sight/ A Devotion Through Ten Objects. We have been receiving daily Scripture through our emails and our church's facebook page, along with questions to ponder. Rev. Duffield has used everyday objects as a starting point for a series of essays that remind us that God works through the ordinary, and that God is still speaking.

Miriam started the sermon series talking about ashes and dust. The next Sunday, with "bread" as our theme, Eric Hemenway of the Odawa Tribe reminded us of the "Sacredness Around Us." Laura Hotelling spoke of the cross, with poignant reflections on the life of Oscar Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador who, because he boldly spoke up for the poor and oppressed, was murdered in his own church. Last week, Brenda, taking as her inspiration the faces on a coin, like the denarius Jesus held up to silence the Pharisees, saying "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"—she gave a beautiful sermon on "The Faces of Jesus," featuring various depictions of Jesus through the centuries.

This week the everyday object mentioned in the Bible that Duffield builds her essays around is "shoes," (which in ancient days were usually sandals). Today's first Scripture reading, that Stephanie shared with us, from the Gospel of Mark, tells of the Twelve Disciples being sent out by Jesus two by two. They may

wear their sandals, but must travel light, bringing no extra clothes, no food, no money. They are sent to preach repentance and heal the sick.

Now we all know that Jesus had the power to heal the sick, the crippled and the blind, but we often forget that He empowered others to do the same. We heard Harrison so movingly sing the song, “You Raise Me Up,” which reminds us that we can be inspired by another to break out of the confines of our present state. If we are burdened by troubles, someone else can lift our spirits. If we feel all alone, the love of another can remind us to notice that Love surrounds us. And Jesus raised up his Disciples to a level way beyond what they may have thought possible; he enabled the healing power that flowed through Him, as one perfectly attuned to the Heavenly Father, to also flow through these twelve young men who had become His followers. As the song says, “you raise me up to more than I can be,” and certainly the twelve Disciples never imagined they would be extending Jesus’s ministry by becoming healers themselves. Jesus lifted them up, and they went out and raised up others.

The story in Mark of the Sending of the Twelve also appears in very similar versions in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew’s version has the twelve Disciples not only commissioned to heal the sick, but also to raise the dead! Maybe this was an exaggeration on Matthew’s part, for this power is not mentioned in the other Gospels, or maybe it simply referred to rousing someone from a deep coma, someone who was “dead to

the world.” But if some of the Disciples on their journeys did bring anyone back from death, well, that puts a whole new spin on the phrase, “you raise me up!”

I sometimes think about what it would be like to have been one of the Disciples;—not one of the famous ones, like Peter or John, but one farther down the list whose name nobody ever remembers— to sit at the Lord’s feet as he revealed the secrets of His divine understanding; to be with Him day after day, watching Him perform miracles, listening as He taught about God’s Kingdom, seeing His limitless compassion in action through acts of mercy. No doubt I would be thrilled with the assignment to go out and preach the Good News and display the miraculous healing abilities that Jesus granted me. It would be wonderful to feel the power coursing through me as I did God’s work just as Jesus instructed me. The impossible would be easy if I was right there with the Lord, hanging on His every word, believing to the core of my being when He said, “you can do this; go forth.” But no doubt, after my successful return, I would be just as clueless as the other Disciples, for they continually failed to understand who Jesus was, and over and over again proved to be “of little faith;” like the others, I would surely flee from Jesus in his darkest hours after being arrested, tried, and condemned to death, in fear for my own safety.

But after the glory of the Resurrection, the faith of the Disciples was renewed. Our second Scripture reading, the healing of the crippled beggar, has Peter drawing deeply on his faith to lift up

another, even after the Lord had left the earthly plane. As Peter explained to the crowd that gathered, "Why does this surprise you?...By faith in the name of Jesus, this man who you see and know was made strong." Peter and the other Disciples finally learned the lessons Jesus was teaching all along: to love God, to love our neighbor, and to remember that with God, all things are possible.

Here, today, we are in the middle of a global health crisis, and never has it been more important for us to raise up others. Do we have healing powers? Perhaps more than we know! A phone call may be just what someone needs to have their spirits lifted. We're all stuck at home—maybe we finally have time to reach out and send a card through the mail. Younger folks can help seniors get their groceries and medicines. Let each of us pray to be channels of blessing, and God will show us how to serve.

I want to share a personal story about raising one another up. You all know my band, Ned, that has reunited several times from all over the country to perform in Gaylord for June Jans Memorial Concerts. But you may not know that about thirty years ago our bass player, Doug Mazique, was killed in a robbery. This was a very dark time for many of us; Doug was a very good person, and it seemed that with his passing that there was less goodness in the world than there was before. It took quite awhile before I came to realize that those of us left behind all had to summon more goodness than before just to make up for his loss; that was our responsibility. But we all had weeks and months

when we struggled to find meaning in the tragedy that had upended our lives. Sometimes when I was in deepest despair, I would call our friend Charlie; he was always there to raise me up, to help me find the strength to move forward. During this same period, I would get calls from Rozlyn, in her grief, and I did my best to soothe her troubled soul; that is what friends are for. And it wasn't until years later that I discovered from a conversation with Rozlyn, that Charlie would call her when he was bluest, and she was there to cheer him up. None of us knew that each of us was leaning on another in a circle of support, Roz to me, me to Charlie, Charlie to Roz; we were friends that needed each other, and had each other.

Who needs us now? Let each of us be that friend.

I'd like to close with another story about Jesus and Peter. Three of the Gospels tell the story of Jesus walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee to reach the Disciples, who were in a boat fighting heavy winds; and Matthew also includes a dramatic scene where Jesus invites Peter to come to him on the water. Peter takes several steps on the stormy sea, but then grows afraid and begins to sink. Jesus reaches out his hand and saves Peter. I believe Peter stands for all the Disciples in this story; they want to grow closer to God, but struggle with their faith. And Peter stands for all of us, too, for the same reason: our hearts yearn for the Divine, but we often stumble on the path. Let us remember that God is always there for us, and is ready to take our hand—and that we are asked to do the same for others. Peter's words were not

recorded when he was rescued by the Master, but I think I know what he said: “Lord, thank You; You raise me up!”       Amen