

2007-10-14 2 Kings 5.1-3,7-15. Ps. 111. 2 Tim. 2.8-15. LK 17.11-19. Grace and Peace be yours from God and the Lord Jesus. A winter's day in a deep and dark December; I am alone, Gazing from my window to the streets below, On a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow. I am a rock, I am an island. I've built walls, A fortress deep and mighty, that none may penetrate. I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain. It's laughter and it's loving I disdain. I am a rock, I am an island. I am shielded in my armor, I touch no one and no one touches me. And a rock feels no pain; And an island never cries.

Isolation is a killer—a spiritual killer. Most isolationists remain unknown, literally. They walk among the living; they act like others, but really only God alone knows their heart because long ago they stopped sharing thoughts, feelings, touch, love. The fear of being known...fear of being found out...the fear of being found human, fallible, fractured, lonely keeps the barriers in place. Success becomes the measure—acknowledgement and recognition replaces relationship.

Consider Naaman, an accomplished man in his chosen field, surrounded by people who wait on him, and yet, he is alone and shunned. He is alone partly because of his leprosy...and but also because of his pride. A woman in his camp, a stolen slave, offers him new life if he will just go to the King of Israel to ask for help. Desperate men do desperate things. So he confers with his own King, gathers up as much wealth as he can carry and goes to the King of Israel bearing a letter of introduction.

The King of Israel is appalled to be placed in such a situation. He tears his clothes, certain that the neighboring King is just trying to pick a fight. Who can be healed of leprosy? When the Prophet Elijah learns of the situation he says, "Send the man to me." Naaman arrives with all his wealth and entourage—Elijah doesn't go out to meet him. Rather he sends word with Gehazi that Naaman should wash in the Jordan and be healed. Naaman is outraged because he feels he has not been shown proper respect. He will not go and wash in the Jordan mud hole. He has better cleaner rivers at home. But his servants quietly say to him...Father, it is such a small thing that is asked.

I reflect on how many times it is the little things that impact us so deeply and build relationship...not the majestic mountain top experiences but the little kindnesses, the little touch or hug or note, the simple gestures that help us stay connected to each other. Naaman's servants rescue him by encouraging him in a small act. Each of us can get connected by listening and responding to little things, and by the little things that we do to connect with others.

Often it is people we live with every day who generate the little things—something extraordinary in the midst of our routine—something that brings our souls back to life. Once in a while Tanja who works in our office will make special coffee, flavored coffee especially for me and brings me a cup in the morning. It is a small thing but starts the day in a special way. My husband often leaves me little notes under my pillow or under the top sheet when he is gone, so that when I go to bed there it is. It might say I love you; it might just be a smiley face. When I find such a note my heart leaps with joy. Such a small thing—even though he is gone I feel his presence.

One of my professors at seminary was so good at turning the burdens of the world into a different point of view. With a few carefully chosen words self condemnation became grace filled acceptance, fear became adventure, loss became opportunity, judging others turned into understanding. What a wonderful gift of the spirit he had.

There are some of you at St. John's who have also provided extraordinary support with something as simple as a touch on my shoulder as you pass by as if to say, "I am here. You are not alone." There are a few of you who give funds in secret. I usually discover those gifts when I get an accounting of the fund. I learn it has grown and I am surprised to discover a benefactor in the ministry of Christ. These small gifts are the witness of Christ's love for the world, which comes to us just as he did—in darkness, quietly hidden yet under a shining star that proclaims to all the earth, "He is here."

So much of the most important mission and ministry of this church are done quietly without a lot of fan fare. In our reading today from 2nd Timothy we hear, "The Word of God is not chained. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth." It is these gestures that speak volumes to the ministry of Christ and bring light into the dark places of life.

As you think about the many gifts that come through obedience, both your own and others' obedience, think also of the many opportunities to be grateful. What brings God delight is a grateful heart, a sharing of faith through the telling of stories, passing on to another what we ourselves have received. In the story of the 10 lepers, we usually think about the nine that forgot to say thanks or the one who went to the priest to tell of the healing. Occasionally I think about the priest and what a joy it is to hear that God is still working in the lives of people...what an encouragement.

The temptation to live alone...to hide all that is troubling...to refuse to admit the struggle, to refuse to ask for help, to present one's self to the world as put together is seductive but bears no fruit. I watched a brief presentation on Mother Teresa the other night. One of her supportive friends who traveled with her extensively was surprised to be sent home without prior notice. Something is wrong with your mother...you must go to her.

The woman (with much protest but having no choice) went home and went to where her mother worked. “What is wrong?” “Nothing, I told you on the phone...what are you doing here?” “What is wrong, Mother...?” “Nothing, why have you come home.” “Mom I know something is wrong. What is it?” Finally she admitted, “I am dying...I didn’t want to worry you. I know how important your work is with Mother Teresa.” What a gift she received through the insistence of another. Sometimes being a neighbor isn’t all fluff. She was able to be with her mother, to give back some of the love and care she had received. Today it makes all the difference in how she feels about her life.

Never underestimate the power of Christ working through you to make a difference, a critical difference in the life of another.

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