

5 Easter 2020

Gentle God, you shepherd us in times of trouble. When the way seems dark, you guide us safely through. When we cannot bear to slow down, you show us the wisdom of Sabbath rest. In your presence there is life, overflowing, abundant and free. Amen.

Yesterday, I opened an email from a priest colleague of mine. She made a reference to a blog from a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary whose name is Chuck Lawless. She found this particular blog insightful as did I.

He referenced part of an article in TIME magazine called: "Start Journaling Now, for Later." Chuck said that what struck him was that, "we know much of history because of the journals of folks who lived before us, and we have an opportunity to tell some of the COVID-19 history, in the future, by recording our stories today". The final paragraph in the TIME article was this: "Now we are part of our own historical moment in time. Our chance to control some of that narrative is in our hands. If we don't want to be forgotten later, we must start writing down our own experiences now." (End quote).

When I worked for the VA, I don't know how many times that I encouraged veterans to write down their stories for their children and grandchildren. The veteran's in Hospice whom I have had the honor to know, have been primarily WWII Vets. For the most part, every one of them said that their stories were

nothing special to pass down or maybe were too painful to recall. But I believe that their stories of courage and dedication to country are valuable to the rest of us.

I admit that I do not journal. I have tried this on several occasions but it never lasted more than a week or two. Most of all because my handwriting is pretty bad, so I print everything which takes a lot of time. Yes, I know that I can type it out on the computer, but writing it out seems to be more personal. Either way it never gets done. As easy as it seems to look history up on the Internet, first-hand accounts of those who actually lived it are irreplaceable. And our stories matter.

Professor Lawless went on to say this: “Many of us attend small group and worship services (even via Zoom or some other digital means right now) with many brothers and sisters in Christ whose Christian stories we don’t know. We’ve never asked, and too few of us are inclined to initiate conversations about God’s grace in our lives.

Further, many of us have children and grandchildren who also don’t know our testimony. They don’t know how God drew us to Himself. They know nothing about our baptism. They’re not aware of any struggles we’ve faced in striving to

follow God. They've never heard about battles we lost or prayers God miraculously answered" ...

This is a point of view that I had not considered. How often do we share our Christian history with anyone? Especially now, we may feel that what we think about the pandemic's effects on our lives is not that important. Or how we feel about the injustices that the pandemic has brought out in society. What does it feel like to read that the weak should be sacrificed so that life can go on for everyone else? What are our thoughts about eating a good steak while people who work in meat packing plants are forced to go back to work to provide that steak? Yes, these are important social issues for all of us to consider, but that is not my point. Are we as Christians, expressing how we feel about these issues, to those who will follow us, so that maybe they can understand and not wonder why we did or did not act on something as a matter of Faith?

As I read through and prayed over the Scripture readings for today, I searched for that word or phrase that stood out for me. There were a few. The words of Jesus in John kept standing out: "Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

Obviously, it is difficult to look at all of our readings and not think about COVID-19. Even in the portion of Psalm 31 that we have this morning, these words stand out: “In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;

let me never be put to shame; * deliver me in your righteousness.

2 Incline your ear to me; * make haste to deliver me.

3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,

for you are my crag and my stronghold; *

for the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me”.

David’s words, in the Psalms, to me are a form of journaling. Through them we are able to know more about his struggles, weaknesses, strengths, times of great joy, and God’s intervention in life. How we pray them, how we live them, and how we share them with others, is not only vital in the times we find ourselves in right now, but have been a form of strength in ages past.

Our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren need to know why we believe what we believe. I do not know about all of you, but I needed to hear Jesus say, ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled’, just as much as the early Christians

who were being persecuted, needed to hear them. My present fears, my anxieties, my troubles, or my situation is certainly not worse than theirs were.

It is not a matter of whose struggles are worse, but that we share our stories and our feelings with those we love and care about. Why we do what we do.

Kat Milligan is a Program Officer at Episcopal Relief & Development and she works in Volunteer Management. She says: “Volunteer management offers me the opportunity to see the best of humanity — to see people who sacrifice time with their families, friends, jobs and hobbies in order to make the world a better place. Again and again, I have the honor of listening to volunteers’ stories of why they’ve chosen to sacrifice this precious commodity.

Those who have endured trauma tell me that they volunteer so that others never have to experience what they did. Those with loved ones in unsafe places tell me that they volunteer so that, one day, their loved ones might know what it is to go to sleep without fear. Those who have experienced discrimination tell me that they will not rest until the world changes. Those with beautiful and compassionate hearts tell me that so long as one person is hurting, the world is hurting. Different experiences and reasons bring volunteers to their cause, but, in

all cases, their motivation is a passion, a commitment and a calling, that they will not fail to answer". End quote

My hope is that each of these folks, that she mentions, have shared those same stories with others. People care and want to hear more.

Having said this, I already know that many of my fellow congregants are saying that their stories of personal faith are nothing out of the ordinary. I have spoken to many that do not see the need to share those stories. Obviously, I think it is important, but especially so, as we find ourselves in unprecedented times. Will Christians three and four generations from now want to know how we got through the pandemic? Will they look to us, to find ways to deal with situations they find themselves in? How many of us today have heard the God stories of our parents and grandparents as they lived through the Flu pandemic of a century ago, or the Great Depression of the 1930's? Were those stories recorded somewhere for us to share with our children? I have heard from various Vestry leaders of how when they go back and read the newsletters and church archives of life in their congregations from 50, 100, or 150 years ago and find that problems they were going through are very similar to problems we find today.

The stories of joyful times are also shared in the records which helps us to inspire us now.

So, if we take the time to write our stories down, will anyone read them?

Charles Spurgeon was a Baptist preacher and a strong figure in the Reformed Baptist tradition. When faced with the impending Cholera pandemic of 1854, he referred to the stories of preceding Christians. His words encourage us to continue the same tradition of telling our stories, as we individually and collectively face the uncertainty and fear surfaced by the COVID-19. He wrote:

“...and now is the time for all of you who love souls. You may see men more alarmed than they are already; and if they should be, mind that you avail yourselves of the opportunity of doing them good. You have the Balm of Gilead; when their wounds smart, pour it in. You know of Him who died to save; tell them of Him. Lift high the cross before their eyes. Tell them that God became man that man might be lifted to God. Tell them of Calvary, and its groans, and cries, and sweat of blood. Tell them of Jesus hanging on the cross to save sinners. Tell them that.” End quote.

My friends, take this time to write down or record not so much what is happening around the country and the world, as this is recorded in many other places; but

how these events are impacting your lives and those you love. Also, how God is helping you, to get through these times. How you are being held up and are being supported by so many people even in social distancing. And how you are sharing the Love of Jesus with others around you. Those who follow us need to know, because it does matter.

AMEN!