

Proper 22C: 10/2/16
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The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

Whether it's a person I knew quite well or
someone I've never met,
when meeting with a family about a memorial service, I always ask:
What do you most want to remember about your loved one?
What do you want to celebrate?

What a privilege to hear the answers.
"We made up words together," someone once told me.
"He was the exact same person in private that he was in public," said another.
Or how about this one, "She showed us how to put on
the aluminum foil to keep the turkey moist."
Details -- quirks, even -- each as unique as the person
who embodied them.

All of which makes me wonder what it was about
the grandmother and mother mentioned by name
in today's second reading,
a letter attributed to St. Paul for his friend Timothy.
It commends the "sincere faith" of the grandmother Lois and
mother Eunice which now lives on in Timothy himself.
Obviously these women did something
to share their faith in Jesus with Timothy.
But what?

We may never know what Lois and Eunice did,
except that there was something in their day-to-day lives
that stuck with young Timothy.
There was something from his grandmother Lois and
mother Eunice that captured his imagination,
which Timothy in turn helped pass down
through the centuries to us today.
In each of these generations, by the grace of God,
people did something to tell -- and most importantly --
show Jesus to this world that God so loves.

And that brings us to where we are today
nearing the close of our 275th anniversary year.

And, oh, what a year!

A freshly painted church, packed Community Celebration concert,
fancy dinner-dance, festive worship with Bishop Ahrens,
and our big red banner flying on Main Street,
just to name a few highlights.

We've got a few more treats yet to come,
but for now we're concentrating on the day-to-day stuff
that this or any faith community is about:

Celebrating the love of God through everyday acts of kindness.

Some are grand and some may be so modest as to escape notice,
but they *all* matter. They're all grace.

That's the message of our parish challenge
to generate at least 275 acts of kindness by the end of this month.
It honors the countless acts of kindness of those
who've come before us these 275 years.

It lifts up the acts of kindness around us right now.

And, by the grace of God, it just might inspire us to greater heights.

You see, the Christian faith is something we *do together*.

God sent Jesus Christ to live as one of us,
gather a community and
show us how to live for others.

To teach us that there are no outcasts.

In today's gospel, the apostles ask Jesus to
"Increase our faith." PLURAL.

Jesus responds not with intangible theories,
but concrete examples of acting in faith –
even faith as small as this mustard seed.

There's an old saying,

popularized in our time by the writer Anne LaMott,
that if you want to see where God is in times of crisis,

"Look for the helpers."

Look for those who run toward the danger when others run away.

You may have seen a stirring example of this this past week
in that tragic train crash in Hoboken, NJ.

There was a young man named Rahman Perkins
whose mother had just dropped him off to go to class
when he saw the destruction,
other commuters suddenly trapped under massive beams.

It seems that Rahman was a “helper”.
He ran into the destruction, lifting debris off total strangers.
One was Fabiola Bittar de Kroon, sadly, the sole casualty.
As she lay dying, he held her and reportedly said,
“Think of your family...I won't leave you by yourself.”

She was an attorney, a young mother, an immigrant from Brazil
who was here for her Dutch husband's new job;
he was an African-American student from NJ.
In the regular chaos of a busy train station
there was little chance their paths would cross.
But in the chaos of tragedy...

You've got to think that somewhere in this man's life
there was a grandmother or grandfather, a mother or father,
who taught him by example to care for others.
Maybe there was a community of kindly people
who were there for him as he was growing up.
Maybe his eagerness to be a “helper” was nurtured and honed
by any number of smaller such acts over the years,
so that he was ready to act when the time came
in that crumbling train station.

Pray God that we be spared such drama.
Pray also that we be emboldened to put our faith into action
here and now, in ways both small and great.

To practice kindness,
and look for it in others.

And, God help us BE the Lois' and the Eunice's,
the Paul's and the Timothy's,
examples of a sincere and living faith,
that our children need today. *AMEN.*

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