

Spectacular

Psalm 25: 1-10

Luke 10: 25-37

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Psalm 25: 1-10

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD! Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Luke 10: 25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

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Slowly, gently, meticulously, tenderly and patiently, he rubbed the discolored and tarnished Byzantine Mother of God icon in tiny, repetitive circles as little by oh so very little the silver began to brighten and reveal luster again. He had been working for just a few hours and had many more yet to go. Having begun at the edge of the icon which had numerous sharp points his hands already bore many tiny cuts, yet he remained immersed in his work. Time and the language barrier between us prevented an extensive conversation so we could not tell just what had happened to this beautiful and holy art of Theotokos, the mother of God from all eternity, how long ago it had happened, nor how it came to be that he was the one to restore it. What he

could tell us though was that this was a labor of faithful love. As we admired his graceful work and care, he looked up at us and said, “I feel that I am taking care of her, I am honored that I care for her wounds.”

There was a true sense of peace around him as he worked to tending her wounds, to restoring a sense of health to the sacred, holy, art that shows the spiritual world rather than the material one, yet for him her tarnished wounds were personal and physical. The icons in the sanctuary of the Church of the Dormition, the sacred temple of the Assumption, in Syros, like the many other Greek Orthodox churches we had seen around Greece, follow a strict religious canon and are prayed with for health, prosperity, and the strengthening of faith. It was through his eyes, his gentle hands and his words that we saw compassionate concern and affection for someone wounded and in need of tender care and healing.

His loving care was like that of the Samaritan who had stopped to help the man who had been robbed, beaten and left for dead on the road. Unlike those who had passed by the dying man—whether from fear of a similar attack, or from busyness from one place to the next, or perhaps even apathy, the Samaritan was moved with pity and concern. He tended and bandaged the injuries, comforting and healing the man’s spirit as he personally cared for his wounds and brought him to safety. The Samaritan did not act rushed, annoyed or distracted, as his gentle peace and presence reflected an honor to care for this man physically, emotionally and spiritually.

There was nothing spectacular about the young man acting in faithful love to restore the icon to its former gleam, nor was there anything spectacular about the Samaritan we now call ‘Good’ for his gracious act of mercy. They were ordinary people, each living as the Psalmist prayed: ‘Make me to know your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.’

Acts of tenderness and compassion, of care and mercy, follow the paths of God’s ways of humility and steadfast love. They are what Jesus calls us to when he said to, “Go and do likewise.”

In our culture of bigger, grander, more and better, we can be too focused, too concerned, about being spectacular, influential, and powerful, forgetting that the most truly spectacular things we can do often begin as simple, as mundane. It is as Henri Nouwen wrote, “it is when we are engaged in the most mundane activities that we make the most difference in another person’s life. It is not ‘excelling’ but ‘serving’ that makes us most human.”

For the restorer of the icon who cared for Mary, his humble act was a spectacular gift to the church, to the worshipping congregation, and to him it was for Mary herself. For the Samaritan, the Good Samaritan, his spectacular act began with an ordinary walk along the road and then he saved another person’s life.

It is ultimately through the quality of our character, not anything “spectacular” that we may do, that we make a difference in another life, perhaps even in many other lives. Our life in Christ is living and loving humbly in the compassion, mercy, tenderness and patience of God.

In our difficult, challenging and heartbreaking time, when a woman’s right to choose is being ripped away by those whose spout fear and platitudes rather than compassion or knowledge, when racism is an ongoing pandemic with no end in sight, when plans to heal our endangered climate are rejected by the highest court and the misconstrued second amendment bears more value than the children of our country, we are called to spectacular acts in our

advocacy, in our voting, in the use of our time and in our mercy, even as those may appear to be mundane responses and actions. It is by our time, service, commitment and compassionate concern that we tend and heal the wounds of a broken and tarnished nation. Amen.