

“Ordinary Heroes: Timothy”

November 6, 2016

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This is the day that God has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day that God has made, let us remember those who've died and give thanks for their lives.

This is the day that God has made, let us grieve together.

This is the day that God has made, let us witness and protect sacred ground and share sacred stories.

This is the day that God has made.

This week was one of those weeks where I surprised myself with how many different emotions and feelings I could squeeze into just a few days. As I shared with you last Sunday, I decided last weekend that I had to heed the call of the Episcopal priest who serves the Standing Rock tribe, and join with other clergy to stand in solidarity with Standing Rock. Father John Floberg was hoping to find 100 clergy who would join him. The number of clergy who registered was the same number of years since the Doctrine of Discovery was first put to paper – 524 years, 524 clergy. “The Doctrine of Discovery gave Christian explorers from the 15th century on, the right to claim lands they “discovered” and lay claim to those for their Christian Monarchs. Any land that was not inhabited by Christians was available to be “discovered”, claimed, and exploited.” (www.doctrineofdiscovery.org). While created by the church, it became part of international law and was used by the Supreme Court over the last 200 years to support the taking of lands from indigenous people – even as recently as 2005.

When the call came out, I had to respond. I called a friend and asked if she wanted to drive with me, and within a day we went from planning a trip for ourselves, to renting a van and coordinating a trip for 9 United Methodist clergy from across the state.

It is going to take some time for me to put more words to my experience, to process all that I witnessed. I don't even know how to begin, really. One of the most powerful things that happened was a gathering around the sacred fire at the camp, where a fire keeper has kept the fire burning all day and all night since the start of the camp, and representatives from every denomination that has repudiated the

doctrine of discovery (including the United Methodist Church) shared words of repentance that were received by different elders of the tribe.

Amidst the surveillance helicopters, drones, and snipers, hundreds of people rallied together, to sing and to pray, because we believe water is life. In the midst of feeling repentance, fear, and peace, which are pretty hard feelings to have all at once, came grief. Brennon sent me a message that his great uncle Clint had died. Clint was a very important person in Brennon's life, probably the most important person in his family life beside his parents. This happened while I was in the middle of North Dakota and unable to be present for Brennon.

We drove 8 hours on Wednesday to be at Standing Rock, and drove the 8 hours back late Thursday night. On Friday, Brennon, the kids, and I drove down to Iowa for Clint's visitation and funeral. Clint had Alzheimer's for the last 10 years, so I never really got to know the Clint that Brennon knew and loved. Yet, I had so much gratitude for Clint because so much of who Brennon is today comes from Clint. Clint did not have children of his own, and he took Brennon under his wing and mentored him in all of the important things in life – fishing being at the top of the list. Clint took Brennon fishing all of the time as he was growing up, and in the boat and along the lake, he taught him how to live.

Our scripture today comes from Paul's letter to Timothy. I think that everyone needs a Timothy in their life. A Timothy is someone that you mentor. Paul mentored Timothy. Paul was convinced that it was worth his time and effort to mentor Timothy. Timothy travelled with Paul from church to church, and Paul taught him what it meant to be faithful and what it meant to have courage. Paul saw the gifts Timothy had for leading the church, and so he helped develop those gifts. Paul knew that he wasn't going to be around forever, and Timothy was young. Timothy would continue what Paul had started, with the expectation that Timothy would mentor and pass along all that he had learned to someone else.

Normally, Paul wrote letters to churches...to communities in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus. But, the letters in 1 and 2 Timothy are personal. They are written from one person to another, and with great love. Paul is in prison at this time. He knows his life is coming to its conclusion, and he wants Timothy to return to him, perhaps so he can keep on teaching him and encouraging him in his future work.

We all need a Paul, and we all need a Timothy. We all need someone who takes us under their wing and guides us and supports us in life. Who have been the Paul's in your life? Those people who have helped you become the person you are today?

Those people who challenge you to be your best self? Those people who best remind you that you exist, not so that God can serve you, but so that you can serve God and others?

Today, we remember the saints who have gone before us. We will light candles and toll bells to remember members of the church who have died, as well as people I've officiated at funerals for on behalf of the church. If they mentored others, their faith and commitments are carried on today by those who benefited from their life lessons and support.

You will also have a chance to light a candle to remember those you have known and loved who have died. Perhaps you remember and give thanks for someone who has mentored you. While my daughter's world might be all rainbows and sunshine, I know that sometimes we learn from those who have gone before us how to live well, and sometimes what we learn is how NOT to live. Both can be valuable.

When you have received the gift of mentoring, you have a responsibility to offer that gift to another person. Each of us need a Timothy in our lives....a young person we mentor and support, someone we look out for and take an interest in. Paul wrote that Timothy was his "son in faith". Paul wasn't Timothy's father, but the bond between them was so strong that they were father and son to one another.

Whether it's within your family, or in your work, or here at church, take an interest in the life of another person and give the extra effort to mentor them in life. We need that in our lives. That's one of the ways that God is at work in the world! God uses us in the best way possible when we take an interest in developing the gifts of another person.

I saw that happen at Standing Rock in ways too holy to even speak about. The passing along from one generation to the next, the things that are most important. I saw that with Clint and Brennon. It happens all the time. May God bless you with both a Paul and a Timothy in your life. May God bless you with intentionality in both your learning AND your mentoring on this day when we remember, and give thanks for, the saints who have gone before us. Amen.