

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Mark 10:35-45

Isaiah 53:4-12

Psalms 91:9-16

Hebrews 5:1-10

October 17, 2021

The Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

¹¹For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.

¹²They shall bear you in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

I want to tell you something that only a few people know. I have shared this story in a bible study or two but never spoken about it publicly for fear that you might think it has more to do with magic potions and fairy dust than with God. So, this morning, I want you to take a risk with me...I want you to take a risk and look for tangible acts of God right in our midst.

My story took place right here...in this sanctuary. I hadn't been at Grace long...maybe 6 months at most. Many of us were still getting to know one another. We were building our ministry as a congregation. I was figuring out what it meant to wear this collar. Who was I supposed to be? Who were we supposed to be? It was a mix of beautiful uncertainty and bold expectation. But, it was also scary...moving into this new space, trying to discern what God had in store for all of us.

Times of transition are most certainly like that, scary and hopeful at the same time...and they also take a tremendous amount of trust for everyone...especially when faith is involved.

And then one Sunday, a young man showed up to church. He was in his late 20's with wavy, sandy blonde hair. He wore cargo shorts and a polo shirt and he carried a well-worn black bible. He sat down right in front of me about 6 rows back. All throughout the service he listened with intent. It was unsettling. His appearance was striking; his demeanor was calm.

When the service was over, he walked out of the church and greeted me. This is what he said (I will never forget one word).

"Thank you for today. My name is Joel."

"Are you from around here, Joel?"

“No, I’m just passing through. In fact, you won’t see me again.” I thought that was an odd comment.

He went on, “But, I do have a question. Tell me about the prayers you said today. Why did you choose the ones you read?”

“They are from our prayer book. Do you know much about our Book of Common Prayer?”

Joel smiled and looked down at his tattered black bible. “I do know a little.” He offered no other explanation. And so we talked briefly about our prayers. And then he said, “I know this is going to sound strange but I *need* to tell you this...you and this church are going to do very good things.”

Then, Joel smiled again and walked away. As he said, I have not seen him since.

I have no other explanation for this young man other than to say that God knew exactly when I needed an angel. Like the words in our Psalm this morning...¹¹*For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.* ¹²*They shall bear you in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.

Joel’s visit showed me that my spiritual life is so much more tangible than I ever thought possible. God has always felt close to me ever since I was a little girl. But this young man brought God right to my door, to our door, to bear us in God’s hands, to keep us in his ways.

You and this church are going to do very good things.

I take that to heart every single day. So what might this mean for us?

You know, I have gone back to this encounter more times that I can count...as a promise from God, right at our door, calling us to listen and grow into a place of expansive love and deep grace.

And what I know without a doubt is this...there is a divine guidance in this place that is undeniable. And maybe right now, we all need to be reminded of that. We

need to be reminded because we have all been disconnected, a little removed, from what we are accustomed to. It has become easy to disassociate with the places and people we care about...to assume that someone else will take care of the essential things in our communities.

But we have been entrusted with this place and with one another...to do very good things from the love and community that we share even in difficult times such as this.

God reminds us of this in the Psalm (I'm going to shift the pronoun from he to you so that we can all hear ourselves in these words)... ¹⁴"Because you are bound to me in love, therefore will I deliver you; I will protect you, because you know my Name. ¹⁵You shall call upon me, and I will answer you; I am with you in trouble; I will rescue you and bring you to honor. ¹⁶With long life will I satisfy you, and show you my salvation."

These are God's words...reassuring us that God is with us in times of trouble, in times when we need protection or even in times when we just need encouragement and joy. God is promising this kind of boundless love to us. That's God's commitment to us...especially in times like these.

And, God's proclamation to us simply asks one thing...our obedience. That obedience, although not a prerequisite for God's grace is a requirement for the embodiment of God's grace. Without our obedience, anything that God delivers to us will be ineffective and will fall short of God's intentions. We must embody God's good gifts to make them tangible not only for us, but for all of God's creation. Together we can lift up this church and one another to do good things just as God desires.

This morning, I want to ask you to believe in this incredible voice of God, that came to our door. I ask that you take a moment and consider what this might mean for you and for me. Because the call for Grace Church is a call that involves each and every one of us. Not just me as your priest, but for each of you, as members and visitors alike.

We can do very good things together.

In the days and weeks ahead, I want each and every one of you to spend time in prayer...seeking God's voice, asking for how God is calling you forth in the name of your faith. Maybe it's serving this church as a worship leader or on the vestry. Maybe it's giving of your financial resources. Maybe it's calling someone who lives alone or delivering meals to folks who need to know they are cared for. Maybe it's inviting a friend to church or volunteering in the community.

We have just started our stewardship campaign for the coming year. Many of you received your stewardship letters in the mail this week. And the most important thing I need you to know is that God is calling us to do good things together. God is calling us to get involved, to help each other, to grow our faith, and to be faithful servants of God as we lift up love and grace and hope. We are only holy ground. God is in this place. Let us now build up the body of Christ and show his love to this world and to one another.

I believe this calling deep within my heart. I believe in this place. And I believe God has knocked on our door and blessed us. Let us live into that blessing with gratitude and joy. What can we grow together? Amen.