

“Spots of Time”

King of Glory Lutheran

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

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John 21:15-19

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Jesus commissioned Peter as another Shepherd, asking him to love God’s children. We are called to do the same, with who we are, being our genuine and authentic selves. With God we can create “spots of time” that have the potential to impact another’s life. In giving we receive, the blessings of God!

In her book, “Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life,” Karen Armstrong writes about being a young woman aged twenty, struggling to live into life as a nun. In her first convent, her mother superior was dying of cancer. She was an eccentric woman: deaf, very kind, yet fierce, and at times even mean.

When it came time for the superior to be moved to the Mother House to die, all the nuns gathered around her bed to say good-bye. As they all left the room, the superior called Karen back to her bed. She knelt on the floor.

“Sister, when you came, I was told that you might be a problem. But I want you to know that you have never been a trouble to me. You are a good girl, Sister. Remember I told you so.”

Karen writes how easy it could have been for her superior to not take that extra moment. She was in pain and dying and likely forgot ‘the incident after an hour or

two.’ But Karen remembered it her whole life; particularly in times of her struggles.

Borrowing words from a poem by William Wordsworth, Karen believes that we can all create ‘spots of time’ for others.ⁱ Wordsworth writes,

*There are in our existence spots of time, ...
In trivial occupations, and the of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired.*

It’s possible, is it not, that Jesus created for Peter, a ‘spot of time’ when Jesus had the conversation. The Rabbi didn’t rebuke Peter in front of the group. He pulled Peter aside. Gently, pastorally, intimately, Jesus asked Peter three times, ‘Do you love me?’ And three times He told Peter to feed and tend the sheep.

I’m guessing that Peter remembered that conversation any number of times throughout his own next years of ministry; perhaps even as he was about to die and become a martyr. As he retold the stories of our Lord and the love He had for people, Peter could see Jesus and hear his words. He knew he was fulfilling Jesus’ wish to become a shepherd as Jesus had been.

The disciples needed a new leader. They had seen Peter’s personality over the years. He was impulsive. He acted without thinking. He was loyal. He made promises he couldn’t keep; even promising to follow Jesus to the death right before he betrayed his Lord three times.

Jesus was re-instating Peter to the fold. He was passing the torch. To put it in other words, Jesus might be saying this. ‘You were a disciple. Now you will be an apostle...a sent one...to do ministry in my name. You demonstrate your love for me, by loving God’s children. You are a shepherd. Therefore, love them in word and deed.’

If Jesus could forgive Peter for denying, and then re-instate him and commission him as the Rock of The Church, doesn’t that give hope to you and me? Whatever our personalities and faults, God can and does use us to spread the Good News. Today we are remembering both Peter and Paul, apostles of Jesus Christ. Paul, previously Saul, first began persecuting Christians. Then on the road to Damascus, he had his conversion where the Lord blinded him. Paul, as you know, then went on missionary trips, was imprisoned, and wrote many of the books in the New Testament. God used them both: different men, different talents and personalities.

Remember, what Jesus says to the disciples, He is also saying to you and me: feed my lambs. What does it look like for us? Our world is a chaotic place these days with wars and threats of wars. Exchanging of hostages. Mass hunger and starvation. It might be easy to be overwhelmed by everything that seems wrong and feel powerless. Yet the interaction between Jesus and Peter is instructive for us. God can move us to create 'spots of time' for others. That helps us feel like we have power to create positive change.

Look back over your memory. Think of a 'spot in time' from your life. When did someone give you that extra time, or encouragement, or bring you flowers on a rainy day? What moment can you recall that left you feeling seen and heard?

Now that you have that moment, realize that God was there. The feelings you had of gratitude or love or peace were of God. God was in that act of kindness, that grace given to you without your asking.

Notice that Jesus spoke with Peter one-on-one. It was a genuine conversation. He didn't require mass converts from Peter. Jesus simply said, 'feed my lambs' and 'tend my sheep.'

Do you remember the woman who anointed Jesus' body for burial? It took place at Bethany. Some were angry that the expensive ointment wasn't sold for money to give to the poor. Jesus said this. "Let her alone. She has performed a good service for me. For you will always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body for its burial. Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." (Mk 14:3-9) Spot in time. Changed everyone in the room. Changed the woman.

Recently, a father and his young daughter were staying with us in SafeLot. Volunteers from St Spyridon and King of Glory threw her a 3rd Birthday party. The dad said, "I'm overwhelmed by God's grace through you." It was a huge spot-in-time as the voices of little ones filled the room with laughter and joy, and songs of Happy Birthday.

What if this is our take-a-way today as Jesus' hands and heart in the world? The first step is to pray. God open my eyes to find an opportunity to be your light – to create with you a spot-in-time for someone else.

God only asks us to be ourselves, using our gifts. We don't have to be who we are not. It's easy to talk with someone one-on-one. Be genuine. Offer that kind word. Surprise them with a compliment. Show up in an unexpected way. Do one random act of kindness. Give a cup of cold water to a stranger.

Then lift that moment back to God. 'Thank you, God for providing me a chance to love one of your children. I pray for this person. Bless them today. Amen.' We do all these things in Jesus' name whether we say it or not.

Jesus says to us, feed my sheep. Here's the challenge. Pray each day for seven days. With God, create a spot in time for someone else. To God be the glory. Amen!

ⁱⁱ Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life. Karen Armstrong. Alfred A. Knopf. New York. Toronto. 2011. Pg 110-112.