

Wednesday, July 5, 2017 - Day 185 – Job 16-18, Psalm 1, II Corinthians 10

What is quite apparent is that Paul was talking about communities boasting of their work to spread the faith, I see there is something more relevant today in verses 15-16: “proclaim the good news in lands beyond you”. In today’s world, how do we best go about doing that and what does it mean to spread the good news? What first jumps out at me is an incident that took place maybe 35 years ago. My wife and I bought our first single home in Clifton Heights. It was a real “fixer upper”. My next-door neighbor, Rod, was a much older man who was a multi-skilled contractor by trade. We never became social friends, but he would always show up when I was having a problem fixing up the house, something that I really didn’t have the skills or experience to be doing. In his hands, he had the right tools and proceeded to show me how to do the task. I still think he was psychic.

Anyway, several years later, I realized that I had not seen him, or his truck in the driveway and there had been no lights on in his house. I called Roy, a social friend of Rod’s, that I had met, to share my concerns. Rod was an older man, and I was worried about something happening to him in his home. Roy came over and we found an unlocked, first floor window and “broke into his house”. Rod was not there, but we found not only a front door key, but weeks of bills including his mortgage and a number of checks that were laying under the front door mail slot. Roy left to investigate, and found him in Methodist Hospital in a semi-coma with several broken bones. He apparently was working on a major Philadelphia bridge repaving and fell 40 feet onto a cement deck.

I immediately called an attorney friend and went to see him, and Gene took us to a bank near his office that he knows and works with and had Roy and I assigned as his guardians. We left with a checking account where both Roy and myself had to sign the checks. Roy and I did this for many years after he came home, unable and unfit physically or mentally to handle his finances. We shopped for him, paid his bills and hired a daily caregiver to help him manage. But, we were careful to not overspend his income.

Somewhere in here, Roy asked me why I was doing this for Rod, after all, he was just a casual neighbor and not a long-term friend. I remember vividly my response, something like, “why don’t you meet me at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church on the corner of Church Street and Baltimore Pike next Sunday at 9:30?” He did, and he never left. He started coming regularly, became an usher, and I think joined the church, became an Episcopalian and was eventually voted to the vestry.

It is similar to my experiences in Chester, a city of great poverty, which is in many ways, a “land beyond my own background”. I have experienced that just talking is not enough. One’s acts of compassion, empathy and love in a manner that promotes the dignity and self-worth of others are more powerful, meaningful and authentic to those who are struggling to merely survive than mere words. As I often say, “there is a big difference between “doing Church”, which is done on Sundays, and “being Church”. Being Church

is the next step resulting from doing Church and it is done outside the walls of the church building, often in “many foreign lands”.

By The Rev. James Ley