

Synod of the Trinity
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Monday, October 5, 2015

Scripture: Genesis 12: 1-3a; 4-5 – Please listen for the Word of God...

*The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. ² “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, **and they arrived there.***

May God bless the reading and the hearing of His Holy Word.

Sermon: Are WE There Yet?

I used to teach at a middle school, and I remember once our principal telling us that when he and his family were on a road trip, and they were about halfway there, his two small boys in the back seat would start asking, “**Are we there yet?**” Joe would reply, “**Yea, we’re just looking for a place to park.**”

For the past few years, our Synod has been on a restructuring ‘road trip’ to a Policy Governance system. **SO, are we there yet? OR are WE still looking - for a place to park?**

This summer, I had the opportunity to hear Sister Simone Campbell speak at the Big Tent conference at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. **Sister Simone** began her career by working with people who were lonely, poor, and **working but unable to make ends meet**. She desperately wanted to do more for them, so she became an attorney and founded a **community law center that served the legal needs** of the working poor. She is now the executive director of a national Catholic social justice lobby in our nation’s capital where she continues to speak for the impoverished in our country.

Sister Simone might be more familiar to us as one of the ‘Nuns on the Bus,’ a project which she led in the summer of 2012. She and several sisters boarded a bus and toured the **East Coast** to rally support **against** a Congressional plan that would **cut vital social programs** for the **hurting poor and the struggling middle class**. At each stop, prayer groups turned into rallies and small town meetings became national news events as Sister Simone spoke with such passion about the growing gap between the ‘**haves**’ and ‘**have-nots.**’ Sister Simone gave voice to so many Americans who were **feeling isolated and overwhelmed** with nowhere to turn, and she remains a driving force for programs and policies that support **tolerance, equality, and justice.**

Some of her lessons-learned might resonate with us as commissioners and leaders here in our Synod as we continue our restructuring journey...

First, at each stop, besides holding media events, the sisters visited local ministries, and in the evening, they held **friend-raisers** where they would meet with supporters and hold informal conversations. Not only did these friend-raisers **energize them** for the next day, they kept the sisters **connected** to the people for whom **they were really working**; the poor, impoverished, and the **lonely**. I worked with a professor when I taught freshman science labs here at Penn State, and he would often say, ‘**There are a lot of lonely kids here on campus.**’ Well, they aren’t the only ones. Family Systems research tells us that **loneliness** is a primary source of suffering in our country today – and in our churches, whether rural or urban. **Loneliness** - people feel completely **trapped financially** as bills pile up with no income to pay them. **Loneliness** – we go to work in the morning and come home early - **unemployed**. **Loneliness** – we find work, but end up having less money in our pockets than if we didn’t work. **Loneliness** – with no one to turn to... Sister Simone found that **talking** and **listening** to people one-on-one helped her **stay connected with the people that had brought them there in the first place.**

Friend-raising is key for us, too, as Synod commissioners. Our Synod leadership puts us in groups when we meet, and gives us reasons to talk to each other, and as a result, **we build** relationships, **we feel** connected, and **we learn** from each other. And when we first started talking about re-structuring as a synod, the leadership came to us in our churches in our presbyteries, holding **Table Talks to talk** and **listen** to the people who make up our Synod of the Trinity, the **people whom we really work for.**

Besides friend-raising and **making connections with others**, the nuns on the bus also came to realize the **power of staying connected to our Creator**. Sister Simone wrote, ‘We made sure we prayed together every morning, but on one day of the tour, when we were exhausted by the pace and running to catch up to our schedule, we skipped the joint morning prayer. **Big mistake.** We thought getting extra sleep would be better for us out on the road. We were so wrong! We were snapping at each other by noon and we knew we couldn’t go without praying for each other again...**And it wasn’t just our prayers that mattered, it was the prayers from others.** Those unseen laborers, and their unseen prayers for us – and by us for them – were the reason why the Nuns on the Bus became a phenomenon.’ **Prayer... that mysterious connection between our Creator and us and each other...** that **WE** cannot live without either.

Sister Simone ended with a charge. She called on individual Christians to **pick one thing, one area where WE each can make a difference in our world**, where WE each can make **our world a better place, and then** - do it with passion and energy. As I listened, I immediately thought of words Barbara shared with us years ago, words of Frederick Buechner, “**The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.**” Ah..., **that’s** the parking place **we’re** looking for.

Throughout her bus trip, Sister Simone put a lot of her reflections into poetry, and here's one:

I always joked
that the miracle of the loaves
and fish was: **sharing.**
The women always knew this.
But in this moment of need
and notoriety, I ache, tremble
almost weep at folks **so**
hungry, malnourished,
faced with spiritual famine
of epic proportions. My heart
aches with their need.
Apostle-like, I whine:
“What are we among so many?”

The consistent 2000 year-old
ever-new response is this:
“Blessed and broken, **you are**
enough.” [So,] I savor the blessed,
cower at the broken and
pray to be enough.

...and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Are WE there yet? Have **WE** found our parking place within this new structure, or are we still looking? Well, we do know this - **we have each been called by God to be right here in this place and time.** God knows **we are enough.** May **WE** believe that and get on with serving Him - in this **Synod**, in our **presbyteries**, in our **churches** - and **may God be truly praised and glorified.**

Let's pray... Dear God, you are always inviting us to change, to grow, to go down a new path, all to do your will in this time and place. You know we crave stability, and yet you push us beyond our comfort zones into the places you have planned for us. Grant us strength and courage, and may we always feel your presence. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen!**

Resources

- [A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change, and Community](#), Sister Simone Campbell
- [2015 Mission Yearbook of Prayer](#)