

Two years ago I stood right here and shared that I had been moved by something I heard Beth Moore say, quote: "We don't share our faith because we don't have any to spare." Well thankfully I continue to have faith to spare and will again share mine with you now.

Towards the end of Lent, Rev. Michelle asked if I would be willing to share on Good Friday how God has been working in my life. It didn't take me more than a second to say yes because God *had* been busy working in my life, and I was so excited and looking for a way to share it!

I was going to start by sharing with you how the complicated situation I said I was trying to wrestle my way out of two years ago had now come full circle. However, as often happens when I prepare something to share, I start with one thing and God brings me down another path. In fact, this one starts with obedience and trust and ends with the outcome of the situation from two years ago.

**Obedience - it is a conscious choice or decision we need to make because it doesn't just happen on its own.**

A few years ago, in conversation with a fellow parishioner, it came out how you might think that if you hear God's quiet still voice telling you to do something or nudging you in a certain direction to say or do something, that it's just that, a passing thought, or maybe even just a suggestion. And how when the timing is not convenient, you don't act on it till you are ready. What was gently pointed

out to me was that *not* acting on these nudges or *not* obeying God when He asks you to do something, is, in fact, disobedience. Well, that stopped me in my tracks. I didn't see it as disobedience and saying that it was sounded awfully harsh. After all, it's not that I told God a flat out NO, it was more that I was saying I would get to it when I had the time or when it was more convenient for me. Then it hit me; do you hear yourself? What audacity! For me to say to God, yes, Lord, that's a good idea, but I'm short on time and really can't do it just now, but I will, later today perhaps, and if not today, I'll get to it tomorrow, or the next day. If God moved in me to do something, it was because His timing and blessing were hinged on it being done at that precise moment to or for that particular person. His anointing was on that opportune moment, not on the moment when I would get around to it. I thought to myself, what nerve! I was instantly ashamed and humbled myself before God and asked Him for forgiveness and for an open mind and spirit to be willing and ready to act when He wanted me to. (*Note: how would we feel if God took that approach with our petitions?*)

This lesson led me to another one. Trust. Trusting God is another one of those things that doesn't just happen; you need to make a decision, you have to **choose** to put your trust in Him knowing that He has your best interests at heart. To make it more personal, let me say it this way: *I* need to make a decision; *I* need to choose to trust Him, to put my trust in Him, knowing that He has my

best interests at heart. Now that's a place to start! And that's where I started, two years ago.

On Good Friday, April 18, 2014, I shared that I had been feeling that I was under a huge burden; one that had been weighing heavily on my mind and spirit for months. I had to make a decision, and I had been praying about it and asking God to give me His peace about it if indeed this was something I was meant to do. I believed that if this was His will, then I should feel a sense of peace about it, right? Then I realized I did not have any peace at all with the situation. So I decided I would not make a decision until I heard from God and got his OK to proceed. I may not have been ready to make a decision yet, but that doesn't mean that it was easy to resist the pressure to make one. After all, how do you tell someone who is waiting for an answer that you don't have one and that you don't even know when you will have one? It's not an answer that goes over so well especially with non-believers. Bottom-line, this was a very difficult time for me.

The night before, Thursday into Good Friday, I had had a dream, more like a nightmare really, about lions prowling around in a fenced-in area with me on the outside and then somehow I was inside the enclosure and the lions were circling around me, never taking their eyes off me. Fear paralyzed me, and I had difficulty breathing. And that is how I woke up, trembling with fear and gasping for breath.

I shared that I had read Psalm 22 and the Revised Common Lectionary's commentary on it in preparation for my sharing during the Good Friday service. The opening words of this psalm are:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When I read Psalm 22, I felt as if it were Jesus speaking, but the study notes for this psalm said that Jesus quoted the opening words of this psalm on the cross and that it was actually, quote: "The anguished prayer of David as a godly sufferer victimized by the vicious and prolonged attacks of enemies whom he has not provoked and from whom the Lord has not (yet) delivered him." The psalm continues: (v12, 13) "Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me." Bulls and lions are metaphors used to depict the psalmist's enemies. I stopped cold. This wasn't just like my dream, it was describing how I had been feeling for quite a while. The commentary continued with: "(v12-18) it reflects 'the psalmist's deep distress and he describes his inner sense of powerlessness under their fierce attacks.'" Verse 21 says, "Rescue me from the mouth of the lions."

Not only was I overwhelmed with all that I had been going through, but then to have that dream and to wake up on Good Friday with no idea of what I was going to share, Psalm 22 being appointed for Good Friday with words so depictive of what Jesus suffered through on that day, and the reference to the lions and how it tied in with my dream, well, to say that Psalm 22 spoke to me that day is an understatement. I went on to say, and I quote:

"I can't tell you what it all means right now... I have to sit quietly with all this and digest it and pray for God's guidance and direction in resolving this issue I have been wrestling with."

The continuation of that situation is that I chose to be *obedient* and to *trust* in God and to stand firm in my decision not to proceed until I felt His peace about it. It took two years before that happened. Two years! In looking back I was amazed that it had been two years and that I had actually been able to wait that long and in hindsight, it was actually easier than going through all the anguish and stress that I had been living with before I made the decision to wait for God's peace. Feeling God's peace didn't happen in one fell swoop either, but rather, it was a gradual process. For at least a full year, it seemed like nothing changed. Looking back, especially over the second year, I can see God's handiwork in how things slowly and gradually evolved and aligned - what a wonderful image - things evolving and aligning themselves for me to come full circle and be in the same place I was in two years earlier, but this time *filled* with God's *peace* and with the added bonus of *hope* for the future now that I was on the right path. The final decision was the same one I was considering and that is when I realized it wasn't about the decision, it was all about obedience and God's timing.

Another thing I came to realize is that it wasn't just about me. During that time of waiting, God was also busy working in

the lives of those closest to me. I am so grateful for God's love and faithfulness to me and to my family. I believe that, typical of how God works, it is all delicately intertwined and related, and I am truly thankful for God's presence and participation in my life. Participation, another wonderful image - God *participating* in my life, not just watching it from afar. I have learned to trust in the Lord, to wait on Him, to trust in His timing in all things, and to be thankful for being able to rest in Him while He works things out, while He *evolves* and *aligns* things. The experiences of the past two years have deepened my faith and grown it to a new level. God is so good!

I want to close with the following prayer:

Lord, I pray that although I don't know when or in what way a new teaching experience or opportunity will present itself, may I always be open to everything, ready to learn Your lessons, excited to grow in my faith, and always eager to share it. And may I always have more than enough faith to spare. Amen

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