

Stories of Us
Temple Baptist Church
8/6/17

Earlier on in the week I was planning to have a more typical service this morning, but after having visited with Pat Motschenbacher and hearing about the California group's desire to share stories of how God used them in Orange and Anaheim as well as having visited with some other folks about the ministry taking place in the community I felt the Holy Spirit leading me to share some of these profound stories with you all this morning.

If you've been attending TBC throughout the course of the summer you have probably seen in each week's bulletin a request to have people share their encouraging stories of how God has been moving in their life, how they've ministered to others, and how the Lord has shown Himself to them. Up to this point we have heard very few of these stories, which I need to tell you is not because they are not taking place, because they are! In fact, not a week goes by where I don't learn of a new ministry initiative that is being undertaken by an individual or small group within the TBC body. This is fantastic!

A couple of reasons I feel led to share these stories taking place amongst us is that 1) *we need to celebrate what God is doing through us as His people*. Culturally speaking, people in the Upper Midwest struggle in general with the act of celebration. I believe the difficulty in celebrating is only made more difficult when we it comes to celebrating the good work God is doing through us. We fear that when we talk about how the Lord is using us that it will come off as bragging; as we're the ones *bringing* about healing and restoration, rather than simply being the instrument God mobilizes to bring about healing and restoration through the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, these stories can be told in a way where all the glory is given to God for the good work that has come about. 2) These stories need to be told so that we can be inspired and encouraged to faithfully serve where God has us and with who He has made us to be.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

This was a Scripture passage that Sue, a member here at TBC, shared with me as she recalled the events of the past couple of weeks. Here are some of her words...

"Chip and I have always been blessed with our home.... there have been numerous times when the church has comforted us and so we have always wanted to give back. Like, when I had my accident and the church brought out meals – it made me cry. When Candace and Randy (Brown) came to candidate for our church – they stayed at our home.... Candace and I really connected and remained friends. I knew her intimately. When she passed, I took a pan of rice krispy bars over to them and they mentioned that Tom (Candace's brother) was bringing his camper and family [so I] offered to let them stay at our home. I knew Candace appreciated our

home – she loved staying here. Vanessa (Candace’s mom), Kim (Candace’s sister), and Sarah (Candace’s daughter) stayed with us.”

When I asked Sue about some of the challenges she faced as she ministered to the Brown family she responded with, “My house wasn’t ready.... my house wasn’t cleaned after having a lot of people stay over the 4th of July. [I] called a friend and asked her to help clean [my] house, which she did. She helped wash the floors and the bedding. I was pretty tired by 8:30pm when the (Brown) family arrived. I showed them the house and then went to bed.”

Sue added, “I wouldn’t have been able to make any meals, because I didn’t have any groceries in my house, because Chip was gone. Cooking is tough, because it requires multi-tasking. I was very thankful that the church was willing to provide the food so I didn’t have to worry about it.”

I then proceeded to ask Sue about the joy she experienced while serving the Brown family to which she said, “A friend of Chip’s [Dean], who is a rancher from Mandan [that is experiencing the negative effects of the drought], called looking for hay. Chip hooked him up with a guy in Wimbledon that is putting up CRP hay. Dean [came to our home] where he stayed in the shop on a cot. [Dean’s] son took his life a few years ago. When [Dean] would get back in from the field he would visit with the Brown family and was very compassionate toward their family. “

“Dean stayed in [the] shop, and the Brown family stayed in the house – it just worked out. I didn’t have any problem opening our home, because I knew what they were going through.... I lost a brother a few years ago in a farm accident and realized what it’s like to have that need to be together as a family. Having gone through the loss and having Dean here at the same time was.... really orchestrated by God. The thing that made it all worthwhile - as I have limitations and knew that I would be spent when it was all over – [was that] before Candace had died she had written a thank-you to us as we had helped her out when we could...however we could. When I read that note I just cried.... I knew that I did the right thing.”

Sue’s final comments really connected with the passage (2 Cor. 1:3-4) that she stated early on in our conversation – “I don’t want any of the accolades.... I want all of the glory given to God.”

“These stories are important to see how big God is....I just see God at work all over.... We need to make sure we give Him the glory and to see what He can do through us.... that is when we’re willing to listen. It would have been very easy for me to say that I just don’t have it in me to deal with people, but as I’ve seen how God has worked in my past I see how important it is. It was humbling.... we need to become bondservants.” “I didn’t necessarily do anything for them other than provide a house. That is what I had available. The Brown family did a lot of things by themselves; I didn’t have to do everything. Within my limitations God provided everything that I couldn’t do, but love them. When we’re abiding in Him, He gives us the strength to do what we can’t do on our own to bear fruit and to love others.”

What a wonderful story of God meeting us where we’re at and using what we have available - physically, materially, emotionally, and spiritually to minister to the needs of the saints. Romans

12:12-15 reads, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." It's so awesome to see how God used Sue, in both her strength and weakness, to love a family grieving.

Another encouraging story comes from Jeri, a member at TBC. Here is a snippet of her story as she lives a life on mission with God encouraging others in their life journey.

"Serving others has always been a part of my life. It was taught to me as a child whether it was in my extended family, my neighborhood or in my country church family. Helping others in need or giving a helping hand was our way of life. After confirmation in my country church, I began to help with summer Bible school, music for Sunday school kids, singing in the choir, and eventually playing the organ for church. As an adult, I began teaching Sunday school to children and eventually began facilitating women's Bible study. It was through Bible study that I began to really develop an appetite for the Lord and began to really 'delight in Jesus and enjoy Him.' I wanted others to share in this experience.

Since I was a teenager, I wanted to be a counselor. Attempts were made but never achieved until God opened the door a few years ago. In the meantime God had been equipping me with an interest/curiosity in the uniqueness of people and a desire to get to know them; he gave me the desire to listen, encourage, support and build up those who were struggling. One of those people was Florence Sletten. At times, we all get those ideas about what we think we are 'supposed to be doing' basically unrealistic expectations. WE get ideas like 'Christians aren't supposed to be sad or mad; we should always have the fruit of the spirit.' And then false guilt sets in and we may start beating ourselves up for being human. WE can have mercy and understanding for others, but often not for ourselves. After the death of her husband, Florence just needed 'permission' to grieve. To know that all she was going through was 'normal'... her passing thoughts were the way her brain was processing everything... and that it was all 'ok' and probably necessary for her to be able to move forward and be a 'healthy' person. It was about granting permission 'to do the struggle,' encouragement to 'go through it,' and knowing that when we get through the hardest part, we will be different. God will have done His work in us; we will have become more like Christ; and we will be able to turn around and help others going on similar journeys.

In a similar way to Sue's story, Jeri's story provides a prime example of what it looks like to provide comfort to someone that is experiencing affliction. We see the Holy Spirit guiding Jeri from a young age, teaching her what she needed to know in order to be fully equipped to counsel Florence and others in their distress. What a great reminder of how the Lord is always doing His work in His children even when they may be unaware of it.

For this we, as believers, should be always rejoicing.

In fact, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us to, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Pray without ceasing. When thinking of prayer warriors that I could interview for this morning’s sermon there were a couple from TBC that quickly came to mind. The first of those is Tyler – a man a lot of us know and consider a friend. Here is what he had to say on his life of prayer as a ministry to others.

“As I have walked through my life, prayer has been something that has always been present. It was said before meals, at church, at prayer meetings, my family did it during times of celebrations, and we stopped to pray for others when the need was known.

Praying brings joy to the heart. It brings people together. Prayer also aides in individual spiritual growth. I believe that as we pray and learn to pray more we are better able to understand and hear what God is trying to teach us. There are a few things that I do in my life when I hear of a need to pray or need to remember a list of requests to be in prayer for. The following are some of the ways I have found helpful and spiritually uplifting to me.

- 1) I keep a list in my phone with dates of when I put the request in so I can follow up with the person I heard the need from.
- 2) I have a white board on the wall in my bedroom where requests are written down. If I see it on a regular basis, I'll pray more regularly.
- 3) I get alone to pray.
- 4) I use the 7 prayer spots in Jamestown that over-look the entire city to sit at and pray over various areas in town.
- 5) Prayer walks! They're great!
- 6) Group prayer is also very good. God calls us to pray, so why not join together and pray together?”

What an encouraging story of devotion to the Lord through the spiritual discipline of prayer! My point this morning isn’t to tell you that you need to be exactly like these servants, but rather to show what a faithful follower of Christ looks like in practice.

The fourth and final story that I want to share with you this morning comes from Dianne – the second person that popped into my mind when I thought of prayer warriors within our congregation. Here’s what she had to say...

“Tuesday nights I go into the Stutsman County Correctional Center to meet with the women who wish to join us. We read the bible, do bible studies, pray and sometimes share what is going on in their lives and take prayer requests. Some of the prayer requests are shared among the women in the TBC Congregation. Lori Markegaard and Jeri Lynch are also involved in this ministry.

The challenge is to try to get them to obey the word of God. That's the biggest challenge, as they need to change within themselves. Some know the word of God but they don't obey. Obedience is the challenge for them. The joys are to see how eager the women are to come to bible study and appreciate our sharing and of course a great joy is too see some changes in a few of them after they are released.

I also like to share the gospel by giving out tracks at restaurants, the grocery stores, and where I get a chance along the way, with a hardy tip.

I also engage the students at the community block party at the end of August as well as during the Running of the Green. There is usually another volunteer or so from our church to help. The joy of that is that I am spreading God's word. I also share with my tenants. There is no stone left unturned! Planting seeds for those who water so God can make their faith grow.

And of course I share with my family.”

The theme of seeking to show hospitality runs through Dianne’s story and her ministry to women in the correctional center as well as to those she engages at restaurants, grocery stores, and other places. I love the way Dianne administers tracks to people she comes in contact with as it is something tangible that people can carry with them and can refer back to as the Holy Spirit works on their heart.

I’m going to conclude the message this morning by asking you to consider three questions – the three questions listed on the back of your bulletin.

- 1) What is keeping you from sharing what God has done through you?

Is it that you fear bragging about yourself when you know it’s not about you? Or perhaps you feel like you haven’t allowed God to do the work through you that He is wanting to do? Whatever good work the Lord is doing through you – no matter how small or insignificant it may seem to you – it’s important that we share it with other believers!

- 2) What ministry is God laying on your heart that you are fearful to undertake? What are you needing (that you do not already have) in order to move forward in this ministry?

Perhaps you have everything you need to undertake the ministry that the Lord has placed on your heart, but are buying into the lie that you are ill-prepared.

- 3) With whom can you share this week what God and the Holy Spirit are doing through you?