

WOVEN FROM THE HEART

Acts 9: 36 - 43

August 9, 2009

(Ordinary Time)

Paul, the Apostle -- the Apostle of Grace -- wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome (people who met in the caves and the catacombs to worship the Lord). And this is what he said. **Love must be honest and true. Hate what is evil. But hold on to what is good. And love each other deeply. Honor others more than yourselves. And never let the fire in your heart go out. But keep it alive. Serve the Lord.**

When you hope, be joyful. When you suffer, be patient. When you pray, be faithful. Share with God's people who are in need. And welcome them always into your heart....

That's what Paul said, Saint Paul the Apostle. But let me tell you about another disciple. A disciple named George. George Bernard Shaw... Remember him? He was born in Ireland a hundred and fifty-three years

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ago. And he turned out well, I think. He got a job at sixteen. Did a little writing here and there. Won the Nobel Prize for literature, in 1925 for a play he had written about Joan of Arc. **Saint Joan**, it was called. Only play I've ever been in -- in my whole life (except for Vacation Bible School, of course). I was drafted to be in **Saint Joan**. Commandeered by my Church History professor at Duke. And the only reason I agreed to do it was because he said, "Nobody will see you. They won't even know who you are." And he was right. Just about *half* right, I'd say. Because they put a bag over my head for this thing. A big black thing called an executioner's hood. So no one, I mean *no one* could see my face.... But somehow the whole Divinity School knew it was me. I just ... I can't figure it out.

Anyway, George Bernard Shaw fell in love with a young woman named Charlotte. And one of their friends said she spent an evening with the Shaws in their home. And she said that while George B. sat and told stories, Mrs. Shaw was just as busy as she could be knitting booties or sweaters or mufflers or

something. And every time George Bernard stopped, Charlotte would, too. She would lay down her needles and yarn, I suppose. But every time he started spinning some old yarn of a story, she would start knitting.

So, when they were alone for a moment, the friend who was a guest in their home that evening turned to Mrs. Shaw and said, “Charlotte, dear, what are you knitting?” And Mrs. Shaw looked at her friend and in a soft voice said, “Nothing. Nothing at all.” And she said, “It's just that I've heard these stories of his two thousand times, and if I didn't do something with my hands, I'd choke him.” ✕

Love must be honest and true. (Well ... maybe not *that* honest, mind you.) **Hate what is evil. Hold on to what is good. Love each other deeply. Honor others more than yourselves. And never let the fire in your heart go out. But keep it alive. Serve the Lord. Share with God's people who are in need. And welcome them always into your heart....**

My mom did a little knitting, I guess, when I was a boy. Maybe even for the same reason. I don't know. But the thing she loved most was quilting, I think. For years and years she would make Christmas tree skirts and give them as gifts. She would find pieces of material that were plaids and solids in red and green. And she'd cut them into squares and lay them all out. And then she'd piece them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

And when she had them just right -- just the way she wanted them -- she would stitch them together one by one, until she had a quilt. Only it wasn't a quilt like the one on your bed. It was round. With a hole in the middle. And a cord to draw it up around the tree. It looked like a piece of clothing, in a way. A Christmas cape, maybe. Or a skirt for a woman with a really small waistline.

And she just loved doing this, I think, because she loved giving gifts to people. *Unexpected* gifts. The kind that say, “I really appreciate you.” Or, “Thank you for being a such a good neighbor, or such a good friend.”

The kind of gifts that say, “You’re important. You’re somebody. And you are loved.” And I think that’s what people felt when she gave them the little quilts to go round their Christmas trees. They felt loved and cared for and appreciated, I think. And just about everybody in Wayne has one, I think. ✂

It reminds me of a woman who lived on Blue Jay Road, about halfway between Beaver and Blue Jay. She was in her nineties when we moved there, I think. And she is someone I will never forget. Her name was Beulah. And she was thin and frail. And yet, she was full of life and energy and love. And everyone adored her -- they just loved this woman.

Beulah lived with her daughter, Eunice, in a little white frame house that stood on the bank of Beaver Creek. And she was always making things with her hands. For years she made quilts. *Sometimes*, I suppose, she would go to *Piece Goods* store and buy the fabric. But at other times, she’d take pieces of old things -- old dresses and pieces of flannel, or squares she had cut from a shirt or a blouse. And she’d piece

them together with a needle and thread. And they were beautiful things, these quilts that she made. Just beautiful. Cathedral quilts and double-wedding and bear-claw and crazy quilts. They were all beautiful.

And she would make them for her family and friends. And she’d make little baby blankets or baby quilts, I guess, and give them as gifts to people in the community who had a new baby. And people just loved them ... because they reminded them of her. For Beulah was one of those people who could just warm your heart with her kindness or even one of her smiles. And she touched people with her gentle spirit and her stories and her faith in God. And people loved her for that. They thought the world of Miss Beulah.

I don’t remember just who it was, but someone -- a neighbor, or a friend maybe, or someone in the family embroidered and quilted a piece for her. And they hung it on the wall there in her room where she could see it from her bed. And it said something like this. It said, “She who sleeps under a quilt, rests beneath a blanket of love.”

Our second, or maybe our *third* year there at Beaver and Blue Jay, Beulah died gently and peacefully, having lived just a little less than century. And the family did something very meaningful, I think. The pall that draped Beulah's casket was a quilt -- a sign and symbol that she had come to rest under a blanket of love... their love and God's love. And in that love there is life.



Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, said the same thing happened in Joppa, the *Beautiful City* they called it then. And it was a lovely place, I'm sure. Joppa was about thirty miles from Jerusalem. And it was built on a rock, a great cliff at the edge of the sea. And from a distance, they say, you could see it shining like a city of light. Because the buildings there reflected the sunlight in a wonderful way.

And so did Tabitha, I think. There was something about her that just seemed to glow. And it had something to do with her heart and her hands. For Tabitha was a weaver ... or a seamstress, I guess. Someone like Miss Beulah who was always measuring

and sewing, piecing things together with a needle and thread, or weaving fabric on her loom for a garment or a blanket.

Oh, but not to *sell*, mind you. She gave them away to the widows and orphans who had no one to provide for them. No family, no kinfolk to offer them care. It was her way of being a faithful disciple, I think -- to devote herself to loving service and caring for others.

But one day, says Luke, Tabitha became very ill ... and she died. This dear woman who brought so much love and life to others was snatched away from them by something -- who *knows* what? It could have been anything back in those days. And Luke says they washed her body and laid her in an upper room for the wake. And someone mentioned Peter's name. Said he was staying close by. So two of them went there and asked him to come. "Come quickly," they said. "Oh, please come quickly."

And when Peter got there, they took him up to the room where they had laid Tabitha's body. And all the

widows stood by him weeping. Because they loved this woman so much. And they showed him the tunics and all the things Tabitha had pieced together for them. And each garment, each piece told a story. Stories of comfort and love and goodness and grace.

For each of those garments had become something like swaddling clothes wrapped round their hearts -- something that reminded them that they were cared for and loved, that they were not alone in the world.

And Peter asked them all to step outside. [Isn't it funny. Peter didn't put on a show, or shout, or say "I've got the power," or "The Spirit's all over me," like some of the TV preachers do these days. Because Peter knew that this wasn't about him. But it was all about God and God's love.] So humbly and quietly, Peter asked everyone else to step outside. And then he knelt down and prayed. And he turned to the body and simply said, "Tabitha, get up." And very quietly, she opened her eyes. And when she saw Peter there, she sat up. And he helped her to her feet. And he told

the widows and the others to come back inside. And there she was -- alive and well....

Things were never quite the same after that, you know. Because the word went out about what had happened. People were talking about it from one end of the city to the other. And many of them believed in the Lord, says Luke. And they became disciples -- servants and followers of Jesus our Lord. ✠

That's what happens when we care for others .., when we share God's love with the people around us. Things come to life -- things like hope, and love, and compassion, and faith. And **there is life**. It's all there ... I mean, look what happened in Joppa. A disciple, a follower of Jesus, gave life and hope to widows and orphans with a needle and thread. And life came through them and through Simon Peter when they called for help and prayed to the Lord. And it came to the people who lived there in Joppa when their friends and neighbors told them about the One who loves us so much that nothing, nothing in all creation, can ever separate us from him -- not even death....

That kind of love -- the kind that's willing to give and serve, to show kindness and warmth -- that kind of love can turn the world right-side up. Really. It can.

Watch yourself ... Watch yourself, my child, in everything you do, and discipline yourself in all your conduct. And what you hate, do not do to anyone... Give some of your food to the hungry, and some of your clothing to the naked.

Remember what James said in his letter? It's there in the He said, **The kind of belief, the kind of faith, that God accepts as good and even pure is this: When widows and children who have no parents are in trouble, take care of them. And keep yourselves from being polluted by the world.** ✕

I knew a fellow in seminary who's a pastor now in Chicago. And the church he serves is an older church. A church that was just booming, I guess, twenty years ago. Used to be a "downtown" kind of church. But now it's an "inner city" church, we call them. "A stately old building," he says, "that was built to last a

hundred years. And now the hundred years is up." And it needs a lot of work. And like a lot of old, inner-city churches, the membership is declining.

But they started a program to help them get back in touch with the community around them. And it's simple really. They make up these little bags of donuts. I don't know what kind. They're just donuts. And they put four donuts in a sack. And a prayer (on a little card or a slip of paper). And some of the church members take them door-to-door to different homes there in the community. And that's it. Nothing complicated, mind you. Just sacks of donuts with a little prayer.

They'd been doing this a few weeks, he said, when an older man showed up in worship one Sunday. And when the pastor asked if there were any prayer requests that morning, the man stood up. And he said, "I guess I haven't been in a church in thirty years -- maybe longer." And he said, "I've been having a tough time lately. I just barely get by on my Social Security. Last week," he said, "I only had enough money for my medicine. Nothing for food." And he said, "I went

down town, bought my pills, and had nothing left. I'd been sitting in my apartment all day with nothing to eat, and no possibility of anything to eat until my check came at the end of the week."

And Gene, the pastor there, said at that point the man got a little choked up, and he paused for a moment.... And then he said, "Then some of you people came and knocked on my door. And you handed me that sack of donuts.... It was literally food for a starving man." And he said, **"Those donuts were as much love and concern as I have seen in a long, long time. And I'm here to say thank you. I'd like to be part of a group of people like you, if this is the sort of thing you do for other people.... Thank you."**

And Gene (the pastor) said, "You know, I guess there was a time when evangelism -- bearing witness to the Good News of God's love -- required people who were really good with words. People who could present the gospel of Jesus Christ with eloquent speech. You had to be some sort of dramatic martyr or a persuasive preacher to be a witness. But nowadays

things are in such a state that it doesn't take much to reach people for Christ. Just a few donuts in a sack with a prayer. It's enough."

That's all it takes to let people know that they are loved with this amazing, free, life-giving love. Something as simple as a quilt or a garment or even four donuts in a paper bag says you are welcome in God's house and you are welcome in God's heart. And in that love that is so amazing, and so divine, there is comfort and grace and hope and life.

Love must be honest and true. Hate what is evil. But hold on to what is good. And love each other deeply. Honor others more than yourselves. And never let the fire in your heart go out. But keep it alive. Serve the Lord.

When you hope, be joyful. When you suffer, be patient. When you pray, be faithful. Share with God's people who are in need. And welcome them always into your heart....

It makes a difference... It makes all the difference in the world. But then, don't take my word for it. Take his.

This is the word, which is given for you. AMEN.

Soli Deo Gloria

Benen, Obispo

