

When we were in Puerto Rico last February, I was invited by Pastor Evelyn to go out with her one morning to call on a couple of different households where there were women who were shut-in living. These were normal pastoral calls, much like Peter's call upon the household where Tabitha had just died. The difference is that nobody had died. The folk we were calling upon were faithful members of the Lares congregation.

Today, I want to tell you about the second of the two visits. This is not so much about Puerto Rico as it is about goodness and compassion. It could have happened anywhere. We visited Zarah in her home. Zarah is wheelchair bound and in the third stage of Alzheimer's. She was in the care of her daughter who was living with her, but her daughter worked Monday through Friday during the day. So Zarah has a caregiver with her during the day.

Zarah is an interesting woman. She is lifelong Presbyterian and member of the Lares church. She has served that church as an elder. She also was married and the mother of six children. However, a few years back her husband died and not long ago one of her sons was killed in a traffic accident on Christmas Eve. Zarah had a real artistic flair. Except for the fact that all of her daughter's belongings were crammed into her house temporarily while her daughter's house gets rebuilt after the Hurricane Maria, you could tell that Zarah had put her artistic flair to use in the form of interior decoration as well as in the form of paintings that hung on the wall throughout. The day we visited she had beautifully manicured and painted fingernails, which the caregiver said that Zarah had painted herself.

Zarah also had a calling by God to become a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church USA. So at some point (and I'm not sure of the timetable) after her children were born, she went to seminary to get a master's of divinity degree in preparation for ordination. Part way through, something happened and she was no longer in a position to finish seminary. But that didn't stop her from pursuing her calling. She got trained and then became a Commissioned Lay Pastor, serving a small membership Presbyterian Church farther up in the mountains. In fact, after that visit, Pastor Evelyn drove us up to that church. Zarah served that church for a number of years.

And now, dementia had gripped her to the point that she moved very slowly, if she moved at all. Her words were very few and her speech is particularly soft-not much louder than a whisper.

Even through the language barrier and age difference, I felt a strong connection with her. In her first career as she is raising her kids, she was a home ec. teacher. My mother's first career was as a home ec. teacher. In spite of the fact that pastoral ministry was and in many pockets is still limited to men, Zarah responded

positively to the God's call. Although we didn't talk about it, I can only imagine the uphill battle she faced.

As you know we took some baby blankets and lap blankets with us to Puerto Rico. Pastor Evelyn decided to give one to each of the women we visited. It was the first time I had experienced the whole process of our Knitting 4 Peace Ministry from the creation of the item, dedicating it here in the sanctuary, sending it off and then delivering the item to a recipient. (I'd never been part of a delivery in such a personal way).

Zarah lit up. We told her that every stitch was a prayer. In her soft voice, she said, "So many prayers." She kept holding the blanket up to her face and at one point said, "So soft." At another point she said, "I have a gift."

At the end of the visit, we prayed. And then I asked her what her favorite scripture was. Without hesitation, she said, "Psalm 121," which is my favorite piece of Scripture. Pastor Evelyn whipped out her cell phone, got online to biblegateway dot com, found the psalm in Spanish, and started reciting it. Zarah chimed in, and recited it right long, word for word, in Spanish, without skipping anything. It was a beautiful moment – a God moment.

This helped me realize again that when Jesus said, "...when I was naked you clothed me," and the righteous answered, "...when, Lord, did we see you naked and clothe you?" and Jesus said, "When you did it for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me." The spirit of Jesus was in that room. Clothing others isn't just about clothes, blankets and coats. It is also about clothing them with love and care and goodness and kindness. And when we do that, there is a healing – in Zarah's case there was some momentary health and well being beyond the reality of her physical ailment and even in the middle of and in spite of that disease. Sometimes, restoring people's lives after a disaster isn't just about rebuilding the home they are living in – it is also about restoring and renewing their spirits – even if it is for a moment for someone in the grips a horrible disease.

Tabitha is described in today's text as a model disciple, "devoted to good works and acts of charity." Obviously her good works and acts of charity were not empty tokens. I suspect that when people received the clothes and coats that Tabitha made for them, they also experienced the fact that they weren't just clothed with clothe, but that they also had been clothed with love and care and goodness and kindness. I also suspect that the clothes and the kindness restored and renewed the spirits of those who received them.

Obviously, Tabitha had touched them in ways more than just providing some clothes for them. For when they heard that Tabitha had died, they showed up in mass, wearing the garments they had received from her. Move over Project Runway – this was the fashion show of all fashion shows ... as someone once described it – a

living fashion show – people showing off Tabitha and what she meant to them not just by showing what she made but also with their tears.

Peter seemed to have been quite moved by the whole thing. He asks everyone to step outside. You will remember that the last time he had been confronted with something like this situation, Jesus was with him. Or more to the point, he was with Jesus. They had entered the room where a young girl had died. Jesus told her to get up and she did. The spirit of Jesus accompanied Peter into the room where Tabitha lay. Peter told her to get up and she did.

Then he called the others back into the room where they witnessed not the work of Peter, but the work of the Spirit to resurrect, to give new life. Let's be clear: this was the work of God.

There are miracles, for sure. The lame walk, the blind see, the sick get well. A woman by the name Mary Luti, who wrote a commentary on this passage, has suggested that the miracle isn't just the healing. The miracle is also that "one person decides not to stand aloof from another's pain." The wonder isn't just the healing; it is that people are so loved and cared for, because that doesn't always happen. In fact, for some it is rare. And for some, maybe even many people this world, they just don't know how to love and care and spread goodness and kindness.

Often it is our mothers and/or fathers who first spread love and care and goodness and kindness upon us. That's why we celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day.

And yet there is so much vitriol around us today. Today's Star Gazette had a front page story on harassment, bullying among students in schools. In addition, so many disasters that beg for our attention. What do we do? How do we counteract vitriol and perhaps help heal people from disasters? How do we know the best way to help or do we throw up our hands because we give up?

That's where the parable of the two wolves comes in: A grandfather is talking with his grandson and he says there are two wolves inside of us, which are always at war with each other. One of them is a good wolf, which represents things like kindness, bravery, and love. The other is a bad wolf, which represents things like greed, hatred, and fear. The grandson stops and thinks about it for a second then he looks up at his grandfather and says, "Grandfather, which one wins?" The grandfather quietly replies, "The one you feed."

What do we do? We make sure that we are feeding ourselves and the world that which makes for good wolves and starving the bad. The resurrection of Jesus shows us that in the end love, goodness, new life will win, but in the meantime, we have a job to do, like Tabitha, to help.

