

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Sunday, February 2, 2020

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

“One More Day to Live”

Epiphany Message by Steve Mundahl

Good morning, my name is Steve Mundahl. My wife Sharon and I are new to Brattleboro and new to Center Church. I'd like to preface my “epiphany” experience by thanking you for the warm and genuine welcome we both felt when we first came to your church family a few weeks ago. We had the wonderful experience of sharing some special time with pastor Scott, and now know why you love him, as we will come to love him. His energy is infectious and his faith, inspiring. I consider him a friend already. What I didn't know was the policy that every new visitor to the church had to come to this lectern and speak to the whole congregation within their first days. When asked, however, I did not hesitate, for the epiphany I am about to share was indeed life altering. So Scott, I will do my best in this short testimony.

I met my wife, Sharon on an airplane about ten years ago. We both had been through tough divorces and were living alone. She tried taking my seat on a flight that had no assigned seating, but God had a message for us and we fell into a warm blanket of tender awakening on that two hour flight. I'll save that story for another day. Let me just say that Brattleboro has always been a favorite of ours, but even more than that, Sharon and I believe we were led here by Spirit for a purpose. We sold our

Connecticut house to the first person who looked at it for the price we wanted and purchased the second house we looked at in Brattleboro. It all happened effortlessly in a few short weeks. Perhaps now, that purpose will become known to us.

I grew up in Minnesota and from an early age, wanted to become a minister in our family's religious tradition. But when the time came to enter seminary, my mother had just died after a long and painful illness, my father had fallen apart and I was left to hold the pieces of our family together. My faith was emptied and I grew angry, sullen, and disillusioned. After less than a year at seminary, I was asked to leave for breaking rules of dress and conduct.

I left then on a motorcycle and traveled until the draft board caught up with me and the national lottery. My number was so low that it was only a matter of weeks before I was in uniform as a Marine headed to Vietnam.

My life altering event happened to me on a stifling hot day in mid-May. I was part of a truck convoy headed into the dangerous highlands in the north of the country. During that supply run, I had a feeling of incredible dread. As we neared a clearing in the highlands, we suddenly were under attack from surface to air mortars and small arm fire. The truck in front of mine was hit direct, thrown into the air, flipped upside down and came crashing back onto the roadway, crushing everyone on board. I grabbed my weapon and scrambled from my truck into the ditch, hugging close to the ground.

The gunnery sergeant yelled to us, "Get to the road! Get those men off the road! GO GO GO!" I jumped up and ran the short distance to the roadway, lifting a wounded marine over my shoulder, then bent down to pick up his arm which lay nearby.

Then ran back to the ditch. The air was filled with burning petroleum and singing with small arms ammunition sailing over my head. It burned my lungs. Then the gunny yelled it again, "Get to the road! Help those men. GO GO GO! Answering that call, I scrambled to my feet and ran headlong into the gunfire and the road for a second time.

Somewhere between the ditch and road another mortar exploded just feet from me. Instantly, I felt intense pain in my head, as though my skull had been cracked open. The explosion had catapulted me to the far side the road and thrown me in a crumpled heap, blowing out an eardrum. I felt for my head as though I might be missing it and struggled to my knees. As I looked up I saw him. A young North Vietnamese soldier, dripping in sweat, black hair mussed up and his rifle aimed right at me. He couldn't have been more than 15. In that instant, we sort of locked eyes. His were black, head tilted as he aimed his rifle. I have never forgotten them. Almost saying, "I'm sorry."

I was on my knees, no helmet, no weapon, no shirt, no swagger, no cockiness left...an empty and wounded shell of a man, and waited to die. It seemed in that moment that all the noise had stopped. I took a deep breath and simply closed my eyes and waited. Then, I heard a "click and then another."

His weapon had misfired. He panicked, turn and ran into the woods, leaving me kneeling, empty and alone, but gratefully alive.

In the next few moments our company medic came to me. He had seen it all. He wrapped my bleeding head, put guaze in my ear and said: "God must have a plan for you son. He just gave you one more day to live."

Obviously, I survived the war, came home and went to work finishing college, obtaining a masters degree and never forgot his words... I awoke almost every morning with a sense of purpose and gratitude. "I had one more day to live, God must have a plan for me." I raised my family, found my way back to church and never forgot that life is only lived in this moment. In this precious moment. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow has yet to come, and only in this moment can we hear God's voice for us and do His work. Only in this moment can I change the mistakes of the past and forge a new road into the future.

I spent twenty years serving the severely disabled as an executive in Goodwill, the last thirteen as CEO in Western Massachusetts. Even though they had bodies that were not created in perfection, they opened my heart, helping me every day to "feel" much deeper than I ever had. I could give them jobs, support, finances and help All because of that one moment when God spared me on the battlefield.

So, in this special place on this beautiful morning, I heard Scott asking me to "get to the lectern, go go go" and share my story. God indeed has had a plan for me, and He has for you as well, for all of us. God is still speaking to us. We are here in this moment to listen, to be aware to align ourselves to His plan for us right now, today. Let the past go, and do not fret about tomorrow, but we do have this moment.

I would end, simply by asking you to Remember to pause, whether it is on your knees or in your chair, or cooking dinner and remember: Let this be our day to rejoice and simply ask, what would you have me do Lord, in this "one more day to live?"

Blessings to you all and thank you again for the welcome.

