



making God's love visible in downtown Memphis

Nothing is Wasted
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, July 25, 2021
The Rev. Paul McLain

'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

One of the gifts I have received along the way was the day that Steve Segebrecht taught me how to set the table at the altar. Steve is a vocational deacon in Lawrence, Kansas. He demonstrated to me the importance of an economy of deliberate motions when setting the table. Steve showed me how each movement, each fold, each pour is a little act of devotion, a little prayer.

Watching Steve set the table at the altar is like seeing a Japanese tea ceremony. Every single motion has an intrinsic beauty and intentionality about it. Each ordinary action becomes sacred. And no motion is wasted. Nothing is wasted.

In our Gospel passage from John today, notice the leftovers. It was very important to Jesus for the disciples to gather and glean every last crumb and morsel. And they filled twelve baskets of leftovers. Jesus wanted this to be a miracle that kept on giving and feeding for more than one day.

Presumably, each disciple could be given a basket to feed himself and others for several or many more days. But more than that, Jesus is teaching his disciples, the 5,000 gathered, and us that in this new kingdom he is bringing about, nothing is lost. Nothing is wasted. And he is not just talking about food. He is talking about people. All our lives have significance and purpose. And just as he gave instructions to gather every last crumb, Jesus will not abandon any of us.

The intentionality in each of Steve Segebrecht's motions at the table are reflected in his life during the rest of the week. Steve is an ear, nose, and throat doctor, and he sees every interaction with a patient as an opportunity for healing, not just of the body but of the spirit.

While not forcing it upon anyone, Steve offers to pray with his patients. The healing power in his hands is intrinsically connected to his mind and spirit. And each motion, each touch, each conversation, each fragment of his day has the potential to be a little act of devotion.

Steve came up with an exercise routine involving using weights while walking, and he invited any of the guys from the church who would like to do so, to join him on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for a time of devotional, prayer, and exercise. Ten to fifteen men gathered on those days at 6 in the morning for an intense 30-minute walk with weights with Steve. It became a ministry called "Pump 'N Pray." It was another way for Steve to share his intentionality about connecting motion with devotion.

Steve started another ministry called K2K. It stands for both, Kansas to Kenya and Kenya to Kansas. He organized medical mission teams to go and serve in areas of Kenya where people may have never seen a doctor.

Over time, this ministry expanded to creating a domestic violence shelter, health clinics, libraries, and sustainable development projects. Steve always reminded everyone that K2K also stood for Kenya to Kansas. He knew that the people of Kenya had gifts they wanted to share with the people of Kansas. And he arranged for trips in which Kenyans came to Kansas to serve and to share.

This led to an exchange program between the pharmacy schools of the University of Nairobi and the University of Kansas. They are currently working together on COVID vaccinations in both areas. Steve knows that a big part of being a gatherer or gleaner is to give someone else the opportunity to gather and glean. That is the gift of dignity. That is the gift of letting someone know they matter. That is the gift of saying and showing that nothing is wasted. No one is wasted.

It all starts with a small gift. Notice that Jesus began with some fragments from a little boy – five barley loaves and two fish. They may have been leftovers themselves from the family's breakfast that morning. The words we use around leftovers, whether food, things, or people, usually begin with the prefix re-.

Refrigerate.

Reheat.

Recycle.

Repurpose.

Restore.

Recover.

They lead us to the ultimate re- word, **Resurrection**. It really means, 'Again, to surge life force' Jesus again gives life to his lifeless body. In doing so, he gathers up all the lifeless and discarded fragments within each of us and makes them into something lifegiving and whole.

Jan Richardson writes: 'It is part of the miracle: how Jesus, with such intention, cares for the fragments following the feast. He sees the abundance that persists, the feast that remains within the fragments. We might think the marvel of the story is that there is enough for everyone. And yet for Jesus, enough does not seem to be enough. There is more: a meal that depends on paying attention to what has been left behind, on turning toward what has been tossed aside. Call it the persistence of wonder, or the stubbornness of the miraculous: how Christ casts his circle around the fragments, will not loose his hold on what is broken and in pieces. How he gathers them up: a sign of the wholeness he can see; a foretaste of the banquet to come.'

As my friend Steve continued his lesson on setting the table, he shared that one of the most important duties as deacon of the table is to help gather up the leftover bread and place it reverently in the aumbry, the tabernacle built into the wall near the altar for that purpose.

Again, he offered each motion of gathering and placing as a little prayer. It was as if he was gathering up each patient he prayed with that week, each friend he had encouraged in exercise, each new partner that had inspired him from Kenya. He reverently lifted each one of them up and placed them in the hands of Jesus, a place where nothing is wasted. *Amen.*