

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole CA

The Second Sunday of Lent: February 28, 2021

“Mrs. Adora”

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Good Morning, everyone, and welcome to the second Sunday of Lent. It seems to me that many times people will read scripture and feel it is disconnected from our modern lifestyle. In today's Gospel we have Jesus talking about his impending death and trying to refocus the disciples on spiritual gifts rather than material things. This leads me to a very modern and quite touching real story to share. Here is the Gospel in 2021.

I met Mrs. Adora about a year and a half ago when she came on hospice. Since hospice serves a vast array of people, when I visit a patient and their family I am always curious about their stories. I never make a judgment and it usually takes time for patients to tell me their story, and should they desire, we explore their faith and prepare them to leave the world a little better than before they entered it.

Mrs. Adora was a black, 65-year-old, single mother who had raised three now adult children who were married and living on their own. She herself was staying in the upper room of her sister's house, having left her own apartment due to her illness.

Mrs. Adora did not have an easy life. The turning point that she explained took her away from God was her decision to use drugs. At some point in her younger life, her fiancé and her brother were out in the street smoking cigarettes while waiting for the Fourth of July backyard celebration. She was in her sister's house preparing

the living room for their small party when she looked out the window. This is what she witnessed.

She watched her brother and fiancé get into an argument and her brother punched and pushed her fiancé who then fell to the pavement. He hit his head, the ambulance came, and her fiancé died a few days later in the hospital. This was too much for Mrs. Adora. She hated her brother, was in a severe state of grief, and looking for relief.

Mrs. Adora's sister tried to steer her toward their missionary Baptist church and the ladies group that supported each other, but Mrs. Adora's choice became the drugs that allowed her to escape her present stress with the swallowing of a pill, a sniff of powder, and eventually smoking things that should never enter a human body. This had left her, of course, on her way to illness; and eventually would bring her to meet me on hospice.

At some point Mrs. Adora had developed a lung disease that required morphine and a heavy delivery of oxygen to survive. After leaving the hospital and being diagnosed as having no other options than hospice, Mrs. Adora began a road to recovery that encompassed more than leaving drugs behind. She would eventually leave everything and everyone behind as she completed her earthly journey.

That last year was life changing for Mrs. Adora. She vowed to only take the morphine she needed to function and her shift from feeling self-deserving and self-righteous, to caring about others was a momentous journey. Just like Jesus, she began to instinctively call her family closer to her and try to prepare them for her death.

She took all the extra money she had and bought birthday and Christmas presents beyond expectations for her grandchildren. She started reading scripture and praying daily. She met with me several times a month to share her story and continually asked if she had been forgiven and if there really was an afterlife. But all this is pretty typical of a hospice patient.

But then there is the last time I met with her. She was proud that she had reached a year and a half being sober, and then the true Gospel, the living word was presented right in front of me.

In that small upper bedroom that contained two over-bed tables filled with medications and inhalers, a large oxygen concentrator, and boxes and bags of even more gifts for family members, Mrs. Adora began to cry; a breakdown she hadn't been able to do before.

In between the tears she confessed that all her life she had looked for earthly comfort. She had loved men, who didn't necessarily love her back; but they made her feel good. She had spent all her money on "feel good" things and the drugs, well, they had made her feel good too. But then suddenly she openly stated, "I can't take any of this with me, and none of it really made me feel complete. Truth be told, none of it really made me feel good."

She recapped that her whole life had been focused on gaining more, feeling good, and enjoying herself. She admitted at times she was not the best mother, sister or friend. She had watched other family members destroy their lives and never batted an eye or tried to help them. She had ignored those who loved her and wanted her sober; and she continued to seek pleasure.

Through her tears she stated that after all of it, it would be the people she loved that she would miss the most. All of this is pretty typical of a person nearing the end of their life, and then she said something profound. She stated her gratitude that God had given her a year and a half to be sober. She was thankful that God had allowed her this time to shift her thoughts from the material to the spiritual. She realized not everyone, including her fiancé, gets this opportunity.

She knew God loved her because this last year had allowed her to create memories and share love that would last beyond the trinkets and gifts she had bought. She realized that the only thing she could take with her is the love, and that the only thing she could leave were the memories of love.

She then quoted today's scripture to me, which is why I present it here, saying, the Satan of drugs was now behind her and she knew God and her family had forgiven her. She had this last year taken the responsibility for her actions both the good and the bad. She said she finally understood Jesus' message of love and forgiveness and she was sorry it had taken so long.

After the tears subsided she hugged me: mask, face shield, and all, and I didn't care. She told me thank you for being there with her, and she was so very tired and indeed ready to die.

These moments of living scripture happen in everyday lives. Jesus' message is not that far away. Lent is a time to reflect on our ways of living and face the "devil in the details" that keep us away from God and spiritual growth. We don't have to wait until our last days on earth to begin to store up love and memories instead of material things and divisive hate. To learn to forgive self and others and focus on

righteousness and gratitude. I leave you with a fairly famous poem to inspire your Lenten practices this year.

“You Will Lose Everything” by Jeff Foster

You will lose everything. Your money, your power, your fame, your success, perhaps even your memories. Your looks will go. Loved ones will die. Your body will fall apart. Everything that seems permanent is impermanent and will be smashed. Experience will gradually or not so gradually strip away everything that it can strip away. Waking up means facing this reality with open eyes and no longer turning away.

But right now, we stand on sacred and holy ground, for that which will be lost has not yet been lost, and realizing this, is the key to unspeakable joy. Whoever or whatever is in your life right now, has not yet been taken away from you. This may sound trivial, obvious, like nothing, but really, it is the key to everything, the why and how and wherefore of existence. Impermanence has already rendered everything and everyone around you so deeply holy and significant and worthy of your heartbreaking gratitude. Loss has already transfigured your life into an altar.

This Lenten season consider removing those things that keep God, forgiveness, and love out of your life. Put Satan behind you and set your mind on divine things.

Amen