

Finding Love in Making Do

Sermon 83 | Greystone Baptist Church | December 20, 2020
Philippians 2:1-15

Today's reading from the Pauline epistle is not a traditional Advent text. But as some of you may recall, last week, your preacher got a little ahead of herself and went ahead and used the text planned for today. So we had to make do.

In a quick Advent scramble, we stumbled upon this gem of a text from Paul's letter to the Philippian church. It is important to note that when Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi, he, himself, was in somewhat of a difficult season. He was in jail. And from that jail cell, he had received word that his beloved church was also struggling, struggling with division and disagreement, struggling with two leaders who seemed to always be at odds with one another, pulling members of the congregation to one side or another. They were struggling because everything seemed to cause an argument and leave people feeling alienated, isolated, angry, and downright rotten inside.

Separated from his church by great distance, fortified prison walls, and roman imperial guards, Paul finds a way to get a letter to his people, a critical communication, a word of encouragement, a reminder of Christ - who is our best example of God's love.

Despite everything that threatened to nullify his ministry and squash the early church movement in Greece, Paul and the Philippian Christians found a way to make do.

Throughout all of history, people have experienced hardship and if we are to take a long view of that history, we might be encouraged to see that despite the challenges and struggles life brings our way, people learn to make do.

Michael Curry, who is the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, (perhaps more famous from preaching the wedding homily for the marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018) ...who just so happens to live in Raleigh, by the way... has written a new book called, *Love is the Way*. In this book he describes his childhood memories of sitting in his kitchen and watching his grandmother's hands as they prepared the family meals.

Curry's grandmother was the daughter of sharecroppers and the granddaughter of former slaves. She learned her way around the kitchen from them, taking the foods and ingredients that were available to them or affordable on their extremely tight budget, and turning them into something delicious. Living with the limited resources that most descendants of slaves knew all too well, Curry's grandmother, Nellie Strayhorne, learned as a child to use the leftover pieces of meat that white folks wouldn't touch. These were the cuts that were affordable and available.

She would take these less-desirable meats and combine them with greens and grits or rice and gravy to produce delicious meals that for young Michael became the epitome of good eating.

“It may not have always been good for you,” Curry says,
“but it sure was good to the taste,
and what it represented was good for the soul.
The food was just plain good,” (53).

As she cooked, Nellie Strayhorne would tell stories about her youth, recounting her earliest days sharecropping with her family, then living under the laws of the Jim Crow South.

“Grandma’s family didn’t have a lot. Times were hard and sometimes dangerous. But they always ‘made do’ with what they had and what life threw at them. That was the phrase she would use, ‘ We made do.’

If Grandma’s cooking was ‘making do,’ then we know what ‘making do’ really means. It means taking grits and making them gourmet. It means creating a meal that tastes like love feels. A meal so delicious you forget your troubles, at least while you’re at the table.” (54)

As Curry goes on to describe his grandmother’s cooking, we begin to get the sense that this food, is not just ordinary food, it is spiritual food as well. Much like the communion tables at which we find ourselves time and time again, the food of ‘making do’ proves to nourish both body and the soul offering us just a glimpse of heaven where our human struggles cease and all that exists is unity with one another and with God.

If Paul understood the struggle in the Philippian church to be one of dis-unity, then perhaps we might find the key – a recipe of sorts – to healing some of our own discord within his words.

If there is any consolation in love,
any sharing in the Spirit,
any compassion and sympathy,
make my joy complete:

 be of the same mind, having the same love,
...Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others...

Then he reminds them of the example of Jesus who – according to scripture – was fully God and yet willingly became one of us, fully human, in order to show us love, compassion, understanding, and perhaps to model for us what healing might look like.

Jesus took on our pain, our perspective, our struggle – not because it was a benefit to God, but perhaps because it was the only way that we could see God’s deep love for us.

God stood in solidarity with us, in the full darkness of our humanity, our sin, our brokenness, and our struggle.

God became one of us – not because it was good for God, but because it was good for us.

God took on our human skin, our human mind,
to show us how to live our lives, how to love one another,
how to find unity when all we knew was dis-unity...

God became one of us to show us how to ‘make do’
how to live a life of faith in the midst of
imperfection, brokenness, disappointment, and utter despair.

Just like ‘making do’ was characteristic of sharecroppers and their children, ‘making do’ is part of Christian discipleship.

Making do is knowing that heaven is far from here and yet working every moment to draw it near... to make this world look a little more like God’s kingdom.

Making do is recognizing that things are not what they used to be,
but also recognizing that the calls to humility and compassion still guide our lives.

Making do is living in the world with hearts open and eager to understand the cries of those who are not like us, and humbling ourselves enough to listen and learn from their experiences.

Making do is commitment to the Gospel of Christ that knows God can make a way where there seems to be no way.

Making do is longing for church in the sanctuary but thriving still while church is online.

Making do is taking grits and making them gourmet.

Making do is breaking bread at a table but recognizing it is much more than a symbol.

Making do is eating that bread as a reminder that like Christ,
we too, must allow ourselves to be broken
in solidarity and alongside our sisters and brothers who are broken.

Making do is recognizing that ordinary selflessness put into action,
even in the darkest moments of our lives,
is the definition of love.

Nellie Strayhorne, Bishop Curry’s grandmother, didn’t learn how to cook all on her own. She didn’t pull her recipes out of thin air, she didn’t ‘make do’ all by herself. Rather, she leaned upon generations of mothers and grandmothers who came before her, teaching her how to work with what she had, how to take the available ingredients and work them into something delicious, how to find ways to make ordinary food taste like love feels.

In the same way, the Philippian church, and even Paul himself didn't make something out of nothing when they committed to one another in love. The foundation of love was already set by Jesus, who gave his whole life in service of the poor, the outcast, the sinner, and the broken. Then it was underscored by the disciples who continued on with the Gospel mission, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and raising the dead in Jesus' name. Then it was tried again as disciples and followers turned into communities and churches committed to one another and to living a life of sacrificial love. This is our inheritance as people of the Gospel, as followers of Jesus, as people of Christ's church just like those who claimed membership in the ancient Philippian congregation.

We are people of selfless love. People who have learned how to stay united in Christ's mission because we have learned how to humble ourselves and regard the "other" as better than ourselves. This is our legacy... and this is all we need to "make do" in our current situation.

Yes, things are hard. Yes, resources seem scarce. Yes, people are hurting and lonely and broken. But we are people of the Gospel, followers of Jesus, disciples of Emmanuel who has shown us time and time again that
as long as we have a little faith,
as long as we stay the course,
as long as we find ways to keep on loving each other and loving our neighbors,
God will make do...

And we also know, that when God 'makes do'
it's as good as Grandma Strayhorne's gourmet grits,
food that tastes like a little bit of heaven,
and water that fills our souls such that we never thirst again.

Yes, things are hard.

But sisters and brothers in this season of Advent, we await the incarnation of the living God, and we wait with full confidence that God has given us enough to make do.