

Witness, Change, Impact – Devon Love



Taking us back a bit. On Easter Sunday of this year, I woke up feeling pretty good. I knew this day was different but not really why. I hadn't looked outside but I could tell it was a beautiful day. I had been watching some pots on my patio for a few weeks to see what might sprout out of them. A single tulip had been in the same state for some time. As I opened my curtains on that Sunday morning, Aya – that's what I named the tulip – had opened up. Aya is the name of a West African Symbol. The symbol is depicted as a fern and it stands for endurance and resilience. I have a tattoo of this symbol on my left ankle. I had it placed there to ground me and keep me connected to everything I've experienced. As I looked on, I soaked in the beauty of this Sunday morning, the sight of this tulip and reminisced of times when I would prepare for church or a meal in celebration of the holiday. At that moment, I began to think about what every day can mean when we have faith in God. You see, this was a time of deep stress for me. Like many, I was dealing with the uncertainty of a pandemic, something I have never experienced before and I was completely unaware of what was to come. Fortunately, when the Stay At Home Order was announced, I was able to keep my job and work from home – a privilege I know many don't have. Still, I was dealing with the crippling effects of a dysfunctional work team blinded by white fragility, anti-blackness and the plagues of systemic racism in all of its forms. And I live alone. And quite frankly I don't like having negative energy in my home. So on Easter Sunday, it was a reminder of the greatness God shows us in every aspect of our world. It was a reminder of all the goodness we can find in God when we look closely at the lessons He has for us.

And this is what I really love about the Bible. It's how many times we bear witness to God's love. In these moments, I'm reminded to gaze at God and glance at life. In the first reading, we hear the Lord tell Solomon to ask for anything and amazingly, Solomon asks not for something that would only serve himself but for a gift that he can use to benefit others. I believe that Solomon's faith allowed him to constantly gaze at God. As I reflected on this, I thought back to my experience on Easter Sunday and I asked myself – What do I have? What do I miss? Here I witness...

I miss my mom, who bore me to this earth, who I am reminded of in every sense of my being, who gave me a name that rhymes with hers and yet Easter is a reminder, almost like an anniversary of when she brought my brother and I to a new family. It's no wonder I woke up feeling something that day. Like Solomon, my mother was asking, truly seeking something - not to benefit herself, but so that she might do good by others, and in this case her children. I miss Sonny Quitlong. I know that whenever I go into the Columbia City Safeway, he WILL come to mind but I also know that it is because of him that I am now participating in Zoom Church. Turns out I don't miss the hustle and bustle of going to my job everyday but I am also thankful

that I have people there who will check on me just because. It's important when you're dealing with a lot of stress and uncertainty.

Just over a week ago, we lost some prominent figures in our Civil Rights trajectory. The Reverend C.T. Vivian, lived his life in service to others. In one of his most notable acts on the push to allow Black people the right to vote in Alabama, he challenged Sheriff Jim Clark saying "You can turn your back on me, but you cannot turn your back upon the idea of justice..." The Honorable Representative John Lewis. I remember seeing a picture of him on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama. As I think of his legacy, I am awestruck that I stood on that same bridge, more than 50 years later to honor the work of all of the foot soldiers, known by name and not, who fought to benefit others, and provide the life that I live now. They knew what they were up against and were willing to give up everything for it. Still, I bet like me, they did not think we would still be witnessing the struggles we have as a nation and in our world. Don't get me wrong, there has been change but I do think this pandemic and our current civil unrest are signs that real, lasting change has to happen. I heard that Representative Lewis' death has sparked renewed interest in renaming the bridge – the bridge named after a KKK member – the place where his skull was fractured as he fought for justice. And I really don't know how I feel about that – changing the name doesn't change the history that the bridge holds. I don't want a name change to become a band aid that's expected to heal the sacrifices that were made years ago or a cover up for the struggles we continue to witness. This is where we change.

There's a daily devotional that I receive in one of my email accounts. I don't know where or who it comes from but every once in a while, I read it - by the way, its called a daily devotional but it doesn't come every day. A couple of weeks ago, the prompt in the email was from a book titled "Kill the Spider" by Carlos Whittaker. He says we often go through life clearing the cobwebs when what we need to do is get at the source. I'm not an advocate for killing things per se, except the occasional bug in my home – I can't stand the thought of them crawling on me – yet that's exactly what we are hearing in our readings today. I believe it's what God is calling us to do in this pandemic and in the unrest we continue to see across our country. Clear the cobwebs so we can get at the source. If you think about it, all of the things that we've idolized have effectively been canceled. We praise athletes, sports leagues were shut down. We worshipped unhealthy habits - shopping, eating out and other forms of entertainment was severely cut back or eliminated. On that Easter Sunday morning, I was missing a connection to God in that I couldn't see past the cobwebs of my work woes. I contemplated what I needed to change so that I could use this time at home gazing at God and effectively realizing what I can do to benefit others. On a side note – in my work we recently awarded 7.8 million dollars of funding to community based organizations, I'm proud to say that St. Vincent de Paul is one of those organizations and they'll be working with us over the next year to develop a system that provides better access to resources for families in King County.

I've seen a lot of efforts over the last few months that are reminiscent of us as a society clearing the cobwebs – knocking down statues of confederate soldiers, canceling TV shows, renaming NFL teams, removing racist branding from food products. Don't get me wrong, I think there is momentum here and it is interesting and important work. But have you noticed that there is

less coverage on the protests that are occurring across the Nation? Clearing the cobwebs is just not enough and it's not the benefits we need to see. When we speak of Ahmaud Arbery, Manuel Ellis, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, David McAtee, Robert Fuller, Charleena Lyles, Che Taylor, Elijah McClain, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Atatiana Jefferson, Freddie Gray, Philando Castille, Alton Sterling, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown - you get it, this list could go on and on and intertwined we have Christian Cooper's experience, the 'Karens' in our society... COVID, health disparities, the school-to-prison pipeline, low incomes, lack of opportunity, racial profiling, RACISM. Carlos Whittaker says to kill the spider so that we can destroy the roots of our deep seated habits so we can embrace true freedom in Christ. Here is where we impact.

My desire is that we don't take the opportunity in front of us for granted. Change is hard but necessary. Let's clear these cobwebs but don't forget to get at the issue. Last week Tricia reminded us to T.H.I.N.K. – I hope that when we think, we will also ACT. I don't have a fancy acronym here. I thought about asking people to be Accomplices not just Allies, Creating something, but you can see I didn't get very far and it doesn't make much sense. So I'll just say ACT. In my opinion – we CAN act in a way that is true, helpful, inspiring, necessary and kind and it starts with us as we are guided by God.

In the second reading we hear how all good things work for good for those who love God – that we are Predestined, Called, Justified and Glorified. It's no wonder when we think about this that a person might seek the Kingdom of God in such a committed way as we heard in the book of Matthew. But we still remember that we live in these times and our roles in seeking the Kingdom have to be active. As Sons and Daughters in Christ, we have it in us after all. It's what allowed me to see God in the beauty of a tulip on a Sunday morning.

As I close, I'd like to leave you with this quote by Lila Watson an Aboriginal Activist – 'If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.' Let's clear these cobwebs and find that spider - both within ourselves and our country!