

Eulogy Virtues

A recent op-ed piece in the New York Times bore the title, “The Moral Bucket List.” There author David Brooks identified “two sets of virtues, the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues.” He explained, “The résumé virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at your funeral — whether you were kind, brave, honest or faithful. Were you capable of deep love?”

I found this helpful. We put much effort into the resume virtues and often we teach our children the same. Examples: GPA, the right clubs, job titles, diplomas, salaries, professional honors, etc. But at the end of the day, what really matters are the eulogy virtues. So much of what we do is addressed by the painful yet true verse of Psalm 102 (103), “As for man, his days are like grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourishes; for the wind passes through it, and it shall not remain; and it shall no longer know its place.”

This is what I see when I read today’s epistle, taken from Acts 9. Here the Apostle Peter was asked to visit the Christian community of Joppa, because one of its members had just died. She was known by both a Hebrew and a Greek name, Tabitha or Dorcas. More importantly she was known for her good deeds. When Peter arrived, the Bible says, “All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.” Apparently Tabitha was a seamstress, and she took care of widows, women who had no family to support them.

The story moves my heart, because it evokes the question: At my funeral, what will people have to show about me? I am quite sure that it will not be articles of clothing, because sewing is not in my skill set. Will there be anything for them to hold a up and say, look what he did for me? Have you asked yourself the same question?

This is why I love the proverb that says, “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full” (Proverbs 19:17). It is why I love the Lord’s statement, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19-20). I remember St. Basil’s observation about the story of the man who built bigger barns to accommodate an unexpectedly large harvest. He said, “Your barns, if you like, are the homes of the poor. Store a treasure for yourself in heaven” (Paterikon Kyriakodromion, V. 2, p. 90).

And so my resume might say that I graduated from this school or that school with this diploma and that grade point average, that I was the priest of three churches and I held these titles and I served on these committees and I went six times on mission trips to India, but at the end of it all, what will people have to hold up at my funeral? What lives have been bettered by all of the resume items? This is really all that matters.

Obviously people of a certain age think more about this question, but it is something for all adults to consider. We all assume that we will live to 80, 90 or 100, but no one can be sure of this. What am I teaching my children... by example? Not, what am I saying, but what am I doing that sets a good example for children?

The article in the New York Times offers some clarity about the different sets of values that we hold; the story of Tabitha (Dorcas) helps keep us grounded in the real world. It is not enough to think that I am a nice person, but that there have to be other people who have something to show on my behalf when I am gone.

The Moral Bucket List

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David Brooks

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/opinion/sunday/david-brooks-the-moral-bucket-list.html?_r=0

Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him entreating him, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them (Acts 9).