

May 10, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



Reading: Acts 16. 9 - 15

The Message: The Dyer of Purple Cloth

[Video](#)

When asked, "who are you?", the Bantus of South Africa say, Umuntu, ngamuntu, ngabantu -- "I am my mother's and father's child, of the lineage of so-and-so, of the house of X and Y, of the tribe of Z."

By which time we in our impatience have moved on to other matters. Yet the Bible is full of similar genealogical material.

A person is a person because of other persons. We are born into relationship, we grow and live in relationship and we die in relationship.

To the Bantu, to the student of the Bible, the answer to the question, 'who am I?' is 'I am in relationship. I am my family.'

Here we are, on this Mother's Day, this Christian Family Sunday, and in this context, I find myself thinking so often of my mother.

It seems my mother raised me for a time such as this.

At the beginning of our isolation, I sorted through a room in which I stored her 'junk.' this turned out to be a life saver, because

- a) I couldn't bear to throw anything out, and
- b) I knew what and where everything was.

She kept everything. I must admit, I did not keep the hundreds of yoghurt containers and broken kettles she kept in her basement, but I kept what everyone has told me was too many of the bits and bobs she carefully saved.

So many of her shoelaces and elastics, threads and buttons, fabric and sewing notions, obscure kitchen gadgets have come in so handy during our enforced isolation as I've made my share of masks, fixed things that have needed fixing for years and cooked things we used to buy without thought. For every project I take on, I have what I need.

My mother was a stickler when it came to germs. She never left the house without gloves, never touched her face, washed her hands incessantly, and sprayed lysol over everything and anyone who might be carrying a germ. After spraying the front hall after a visit from my brother, my mom went upstairs quickly when my tiny daughter who was staying with her called. What she thought was lysol, was actually pledge and she did a major flip and knocked herself out. She willed herself not to pass out till she had seen to Alex and called me. I'm still using her soap; my daughter her lysol; there is enough dettol to disinfect the next generation. And I access her perseverance daily.

But more important than this, I remember my mother's stories of her youth. Nights spent in Anderson bomb shelters that twisted her spine,

curfews that had her making her way home in pitch black on occasion being knocked down by a bicyclist heading toward her in the dark, having her husband go missing in action and not knowing what happened to him; risking her own safety by going out to families who had similar news to provide comfort, and the rationing of goods that got worse and worse as the war progressed and went on for years after the war ended.

These were the reasons she could cook any part of an animal, hoarded essentials, recycled what was worn out, and never threw out what just might, some day, be of use. And her greatest joy was the abundance of food to feed her family and anyone else who crossed her threshold.

These stories have sustained me. She did it, for longer, under more trying circumstances, for years. And years.

My mother passed on skills I would need, the materials I would need, and the faith that I could survive and thrive through difficulty.

Let's think for a moment about Lydia, the dyer of purple cloth. She was a daughter and a mother, who was a faithful worshipper of God.

When Paul arrived in Philippi and began to preach the good news at the place where people prayed, Lydia responded to Paul's message and, with the members of her household - was baptized.

She was a worshipper of God. And God opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

It is "God's action that opens people's hearts", God who brings people to faith in Jesus Christ.

What she did after her heart was opened to Paul's message, she did what God wants us all to do - she believed.

She and her household were baptised - and then she opened her home to Paul and his companions, saying to them, "If you consider me a believer in God, come and stay at my house."

Lydia invites Paul and his companions - strangers to her city - but now members of her faith family - to come and stay at her house. To become members of her family.

We are our family.

The Bible promises that steadfast love is shown to the thousandth generation of those who love God and keep God's commandments.

When Lydia received the presence of God, she opened her family to God's messengers.

On this Christian Family Sunday, Mothers' Day, think about the generations of your family and what gifts they have given you to thrive in times such as these. And think of Lydia, that dyer of purple cloth, a leader in her family, a matriarch, who brought her family to Christ and then welcomed God's messengers as part of her family.

Who are you? You are your mother's child, but you are also God's child.

And know that you are a part of God's family at Christ First