

There's being prepared, and then there's being prepared the Sabrina Tyndall way.

On a recent Passport Kids retreat with our 3rd – 5th graders, I had the pleasure of rooming with Sabrina. Through the blazing temperature of that heatwave we had in July, we all lugged our bags up multiple flights of stairs to our dorm rooms at Converse College. Our gradeschoolers got started with their unpacking, and Sabrina and I went to our room to do the same. I was pulling out sheets to put on my bed when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sabrina plunk an open-top bag – sort-of like a beach bag -- on her bed. And from that, she proceeded to pull out an electric fan in case our dorm room got too hot, an extra-cozy fleece blanket in case it got too cold, a spare back-pack in case anyone forgot theirs, and a bathmat to put at the side of her bed to wipe her feet before sliding under the covers each night. There was a minute there when I fully expected her to pull out a lamp and bedside table to go with it! It was like Mary Poppins' bottomless carpet bag!

But Sabrina was ready. She embodied the scout motto, BE PREPARED, and was ready to tackle whatever this chaperone gig might bring!

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus is encouraging his disciples to embody that same motto, to be prepared.

Let me take a second to set the scene: Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. As was typical, a large crowd of people have gathered around to hear Jesus' teachings. The syllabus for the day focused on the perils of hypocrisy and greed – and the anxiety that comes from being consumed by material wealth.

Our scripture lesson today picks up with Jesus addressing a smaller group, his disciples. It's sandwiched between two stories of Jesus teaching that large crowd, so I envision the disciples up close, directly in front of him, with the crowd still circling around.

He's taking time to assuage the disciples' fears about the day they will be held accountable to God by impressing upon them that their place, their future in God's Kingdom, is secure, but they must prepare themselves for it. Only the preparation has nothing to do with tangible "stuff" and everything to do with generosity and service.

Listen to Jesus' words in Luke 12:32-40 and see if you hear it too:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for the Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Be dressed and ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them

recline at the table and will come and wait on the them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect him."

It was Jesus' hope that God's kingdom would transform life on earth, and bring God's reign of justice and peace into the everyday lives of the poor and marginalized he lived among, into the here and now. We hear this reflected in the prayer we just prayed together, the prayer Jesus himself taught us: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." So every day is a day when we're held accountable to God. Every day is a day we have the opportunity to bring heaven to earth.

So just how do we prepare to bring God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven?

"Sell your possessions," Jesus says to his disciples, "and give to the poor."

Now let's think about that for a second... he's sort of preaching to the choir, don't you think? After all, when Jesus said, "Follow me", **they** did! They left their nets – and homes – and jobs – even their families behind. They moved throughout Galilee and Judea, relying solely on the generosity and hospitality of others. And they gave! Not tangible stuff. Rather, they gave tirelessly of their time – and devoted their whole lives -- to Jesus and his ministry.

But there was that crowd who was there that day, remember? Still hanging around, still listening in. And as Jesus was speaking with his disciples, I imagine he not only knew he had a wider audience but I bet he was speaking so that they might hear and recognize the example set by this rag tag bunch who were willing to leave it all behind and fully trust Jesus to lead them. Can't you just see the people in the crowd leaning in, straining to hear the inside scoop, only to realize the inside scoop is that this man named Jesus demands they give their ALL?

We can imagine how that message was received... we can imagine because we're sometimes part of that crowd, aren't we? Standing around the perimeter, listening but not quite willing to step in and get our hands dirty...

It's far more bearable for us to be generous with our resources and stroke a check than it is to let go of them -- these external, touchable things that we think give us a sense of security -- our homes, our cars, our phones and other devices, our jobs. So often, we allow these things --this stuff--to consume us, to define us, don't we?

But when we loosen our grip on what we own – and what owns us-- it sure helps us **redefine** our priorities, doesn't it? Anyone who has been through the hardship of losing a job – or losing a home -- knows this first-hand.

I remember watching news coverage when a tornado ripped through Alabama in March. There was an elderly man standing by the scattered rubble that hours earlier was his home and all

that he owned. While he was being interviewed, there were people in the background who were sitting on the ground, helping to sort through what was left. At one point, the reporter said, "This storm, sir. It's taken all you have. How are you dealing with that?" And the man looked around at all the people who had shown up, and he said, "This storm has taken a lot from me. But I have a feelin' I've got all the riches I need."

I think that's Jesus' point, don't you? He calls us to divest, literally or figuratively, in the material "stuff" that we so desperately hold onto, this stuff that distracts us and exposes us to greed and pride. Jesus calls us to let go in order for our hands and hearts to be open to the work of God's kingdom. And in Luke's narrative, that work of God's kingdom is giving to the poor.

We hear a similar message echoed in our reading from Isaiah. In some of the first verses Divine read, Isaiah accuses the leaders of Judah, "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!" Sodom and Gomorrah were evil places, no doubt, but not for the reasons you might be thinking. According to the prophet Ezekiel, Sodom's sin was not about sexual violence. Rather, in Ezekiel's words: "This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and the needy (Ezekiel 16:49-50)."

If that was Sodom's sin – having more than enough and not sharing with those in need – then it begs the question -- who might be the Sodomites of our day?

Isaiah goes on to accuse the rulers and elite in Jerusalem of behaving like the people of Sodom. They don't try to "rescue the oppressed," they don't "defend the orphan," or "plead for the widow." Instead, they try to win God's favor by making all the proper sacrifices in the temple, but God is not impressed. Fundamental to coming into the presence of God is living a life of selfless generosity and obedience. Isaiah's message is that the way to please God is to put hands and feet to our worship and seek justice for the powerless.

Justice is at the heart of Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God. In God's kingdom, there will be no suffering, and the resources God has given us will be shared equitably so that everyone has enough. As citizens of God's kingdom, we live under the charity of God. The Caritas of God. Only caritas goes deeper than merely taking out our wallets and donating money to a good cause; it is that selfless, unconditional, and voluntary loving kindness we see in Jesus – it's the way Jesus loves us, and the way we are called to love others.

And as we imitate God's loving kindness toward us, as we are charitable toward others, our caritas must lead us inevitably toward justice, to begin to wonder why the needs are so endless; why are there so many mouths to feed; why are there so many people without a place to sleep? It causes us to examine the conditions that create so much suffering in the world, and do what we can to make a change.

There's so much need, so much struggle, so much heartache in our world, it's overwhelming sometimes...

But Jesus prepared us for a future where there is *hope*, where God's kingdom can reign on earth, where there **can** be justice and peace. He has instructed us to imitate the *caritas*, the selfless loving kindness, of Jesus... because when we give to those in need, we move closer to them.... and when we move closer to them, we are able to hear their stories... and when we hear their stories, we hear God's voice calling for change.... And when we hear God's voice, it cannot help but change us and empower us.

It can't help but transform our vision of what the world ought to be and, by God and through God, can be.

We spend a lot of time preparing for our future, don't we? Students of all ages flock to Target for school supplies to ready themselves for a successful school year; athletes run drills again and again, perfecting their skills and preparing for their opponents; young parents tuck aside money for college funds while others plan for retirement.

And I think we do that because, in this world where so much is unknown or beyond our control – and in this world where worry has a way of seeping into all the cracks left by the unknown – being prepared seems to be one thing we can do to help us feel we have a handle on our future.

Jesus knows that about us. So he teaches us HOW to be prepared. He teaches us to carefully examine what has a hold on us – where we place our priorities. He teaches us to loosen our grip so that we have hands and hearts ready to give. He assures us of our security in God's kingdom when we're faithful and prepared, or in Jesus' words "dressed and ready for service, with lamps burning, like servants who are waiting for their master to return." And the treasures that we ARE to hold on to – well, there're the ones that we can't see with our eyes but can surely feel with our hearts, the ones that even an F7 tornado can't destroy.

Jesus spent his life preparing us for his kingdom. And just as he prepared a table for his faithful followers in that upper room so long ago, he prepares this table for us, so that we can gather around and remember him and all he taught us.

So Lord, gather us in—the rich and the haughty, Gather us in – the proud and the strong,

Give us a heart so meek and so lowly, Give us the courage to enter the song.

Give us to drink the wine of compassion, Give us to eat the bread that is you;

Nourish us well, and teach us to fashion lives that are holy and hearts that are true.