

Devotion – Week of January 23, 2022
Rev. Jeanne Simpson

We're spending a couple of weeks post Christmastide looking at Jesus growing up and beginning his ministry. I thought about that as I held my first meeting last week as Chair of the Presbytery's Examinations Commission. We examine all candidates who have received calls to ministry and have not been ordained, and we receive ordained pastors from other presbyteries who have received a call within our presbytery. Lately I have been struck with the passion and devotion of these candidates – many of whom are taking validated calls as chaplains in hospitals and hospices. They don't generally hold worship services. They generally interact with very sick and dying people in the emergency room, NICU, ICU, or oncology wards. They don't know these people, but they do know these people are in distress. And they have to connect with them, support them, and help them in these times of despair.

How they do it day after day is incredible. They did talk about the need to be able to have some time to talk to a supervisor or mentor and to de-stress. As a former social worker who dealt with child sexual abuse day after day, I understand that. It's like our COVID medical staff who deal with severe illness and dying continuously. We all need a break from these kinds of situations, and we need someone empathetic to talk to.

The favorite Bible verse that one chaplain quoted was this from 1 Corinthians – words you know well:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

We often use those words in weddings, but as a chaplain, those words mean that the driving force of service to these people in dire medical straits is to reach out from a position of love to start with. The chaplain has to assume that approaching a stranger in love will result in comfort. I am so thankful for these ministers who serve strangers in these places of sickness and dying, and I hope I can remember that every interaction that I have as a minister should start from this same position of love. Because Paul said it so well – love helps us through trauma and turmoil, love gives us hope, and love endures, when all else seems to be hopeless.

May you experience this type of love this week.

Jeanne