

Devotion, Week 2 of Lent, 2023

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

As we prepare to celebrate our grandmothers this coming Sunday, I am reminded of our PW Bible Study last year, "What My Grandmothers Taught me." Among others, we looked at the following people:

A woman who acted as a prostitute to be faithful to her family

A prostitute

A foreign migrant

A woman taken for a man's sexual pleasure

An unwed mother who flees as a refugee

Why these people? Because each of these women is found in Jesus' genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew! The women are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary, the mother of Jesus. These ordinary and resourceful women showed strength in adverse situations and produced children who were clan leaders, kings, and the Messiah. None of the women had an easy time of it, but they prevailed and enabled God's children to survive.

I think that's what I admire about my grandmothers, who raised families during the Depression and served as role models in the community for generosity and faith. They lived in a rural, western North Carolina community of farmers, where work was hard. They were neighbors, and in fact, distant cousins, and they attended the small Baptist church nearby every Sunday. My parents grew up together in this church and community, and as children were Mary and Joseph in the Christmas pageant. I found among my mother's papers a tithing form, where my grandmother Katie pledged a dime a week in 1931. That had to be a sacrifice for her, with 10 children to feed and my grandfather being a truck farmer, but she supported her church faithfully, by playing the organ on Sunday, teaching the Adult Ladies' Sunday School class, and making the communion bread and bottling the communion grape juice. All the children were dressed in their nicest clothes, my grandfather always had a suit, and she always wore a big hat and a lace collar on her dress. Church was serious business, and she usually fed the preacher after church on Sundays.

Her faith has been passed down to her children and grandchildren, and it was a huge part of our understanding of the world growing up. Her pump organ is in my den, and her wedding portrait hangs on my wall. She once said, "God can do anything." And she was right.

My grandmother Hattie worked as a nurse's aide at the state mental hospital but was known for her expertise in quilting and sewing. She taught me to sew on a pedal sewing machine that sits in my house today, and she made me a quilt as a wedding present. I have always felt that I was embraced in the arms of God, and I think that is the legacy of both of my grandmothers. I hope I have passed that sense of belonging down to my daughters.

I hope you will remember the stories of your faithful grandmothers and share them with your children and grandchildren, as well as your church family.

Jeanne