

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by Tim Dumont, a Member of Our Church

February 22, 2015

First Sunday in Lent

Witness to the Spirit of God – Trust in God

I am here today to give witness to the spirit of God through an experience I had on December 28th, which so greatly impacted me that when I got home I sat down and typed this letter. Just for the record, I have never done that or this before.

I should tell you first that I do not believe in “coincidences.” Those I have spent time with on church committees, classes and the Wednesday prayer service already know this of me. It is not that the experience of a coincidence does not exist, for certainly it does. Things sometimes happen that cannot be explained and some people just ignore them or shrug them off as a mere coincidence. I believe that when we do this we lose something special. We miss out on a spiritual opportunity. You see - I believe in my heart that it is at those moments that the very spirit of God is “with or around you” reaching out to you, communicating with you in a spiritual and very personal way. While these opportunities do not happen all of the time, when they do happen, I find them to be a spiritually uplifting experience. And most importantly for me, it affirms that God is with us.

On Sunday, December 28th, the first Sunday after Christmas following church it was the deacon’s responsibility to deliver poinsettias to the homes of people who had been listed on the poinsettia order forms to receive their plants. These are the poinsettias that decorate our altar during the Christmas services and again on the Sunday that follows. Some of the deacons gathered after the service and reviewed the names, deciding who was available to make deliveries and to which people on the list. A couple of the requests were for flowers to be given to “shut-ins” and we came up with names of people to whom those plants could be given. During the “thinking process”, the name Judy Sargent came to my mind. A life-long Grotonian and member of our church, I knew Judy long before I joined the church years ago. I knew she had lived alone in Groton and a couple of years ago had to give up her home for health reasons and she moved to an assisted living home but I did not know where. Unfortunately, these plants needed to be delivered today. There was no time to find out where Judy now resided. I had five names for plant deliveries and so I loaded them into my truck. Greg Balligan and Erica Davenport also took several deliveries to church members.

The first three deliveries I made went off without a problem. Short visits with kind words, warm greetings of Merry Christmas/Happy New Year and a reminder that we (the church) were praying for them. On the fourth delivery I was told that the poinsettia plant had already been picked up after the Christmas Eve service. Of course that was okay. I still had a nice visit and went on my way – **only now I had a problem - I had an extra plant.** What do I do? Give out two at the next stop? Bring the extra plant back to the sanctuary? Take it home? Oh well - I figured I would deal with the extra plant problem after the last visit.

It was on the fifth delivery that I stalled with a sense of not knowing what to do. A feeling of inadequacy I would have no answer for descended upon me. Thank you to Charlene Kelly for allowing me to share this experience. You see, it was her Mom, Marlene Byron, to whom I was delivering a poinsettia. Marlene is living at Nashoba Park, an assisted living facility in Ayer. I had never been there so I used my iPhone GPS to find my way. I entered and was met with a friendly smile from the receptionist at the front

desk. She asked me if I wanted the staff to deliver the poinsettia to Marlene or did I want to bring it to her myself. At first I said you can deliver them, for I didn't want to upset her. After all – I do not personally know Marlene – I would be a stranger. Would I frighten her? Would I feel awkward and not know what to say? Shame on me - I knew that I should deliver them, so I recanted and told the receptionist I would deliver the plant to her. She smiled and said that Marlene would like that and told me I could find her in room 105.

When I got to room 105 I checked the name on the wall to make sure I was at the correct room. The door was open and I looked in and saw her sitting quietly asleep in front of the TV. My heart sank - I was a stranger knocking on her door, interrupting her sleep. But I needed to deliver the plant, so I knocked on the door and Marlene slowly opened her eyes to find this tall man standing in the doorway. When I entered the room Marlene seemed a bit surprised because as I have already said, we have never met. I bent down and introduced myself and told her I was from the Union Congregational Church in Groton and was delivering a poinsettia from the church for her to enjoy. Her face brightened up at the site of the poinsettia but she still seemed uneasy with my visit. I then told her that I knew her daughter Charlene and Steve Legge from the church. Recognizing the familiarity of the names she immediately responded with a knowing look which lifted her uneasiness. In retrospect, I forgot to tell her the plant I was delivering was actually donated by Steve Legge. Sorry Steve, I was outside of my comfort zone and doing my best, just not very well. I attempted to have a conversation with her but between the TV volume, my own hearing difficulties and her quiet tone I could not understand many of the words she spoke and simply nodded in agreement hoping that the nod would fit in with what she was saying. That seemed so insincere to me but it was all I could come up with.

Meanwhile, I prayed inside for help – *Jesus, what should I say? What should I do? Please - give me guidance here.* I felt so awkward and I was at such a loss. I visited with Marlene for about 5-10 minutes and in the end said “God Bless You” and told her she was “in our prayers.” Again, I noticed her face brighten at hearing those words, “God Bless You” and “you are in our prayers.” I could just make out her saying thank you to the church for the poinsettia plant. I wished her a merry Christmas and Happy New Year and departed. I must admit that I felt I had not done a good job. I felt inadequate to the task. How could I not think of more appropriate things to say? As I made my way out of the room and down the hall I felt sad. Had I failed? I think we have all had an experience in our lives at some point or another where we have shared this feeling of being inadequate – it is empty, it is hollow and it is bottomless.

As I continued down the hall I walked into a seating area next to the lobby door and as I lifted my head I looked directly into the face of a woman approaching me. **It was Judy Sargent.** What a surprise! She looked at me and immediately smiled recognizing my face. I said “Hi Judy how are you?” With a bright smile she said “good, but what is your name?” I told her my name was Tim and she said “of course.” I am not really sure if she remembered me or was just being polite. Just as with Marlene I mentioned the names of other people, family members she would remember and the familiarity seemed to bring things together in her mind. She asked what I was doing there and I said I had just dropped off something for someone - **and that is when it hit me – (I HAVE AN EXTRA PLANT!),** without missing a beat I told her that I had something for her too. She looked awestruck and pulling her hand to her chest she replied, “For Me”? I said “yes, but it is out in my truck. I will go and get it. What room are you in?” She had to look at her key tag to read the number and told me Room 104. Then it was my turn to be awestruck for **I had just visited Marlene Byron in Room 105! – They were next door neighbors!**

As I walked outside to get the plant, the “spirit bells” were going off in my head. Why and how did Judy's name come to me that morning? How did I end up with an extra plant? Why did I get Marlene's name to deliver a poinsettia to at Nashoba Park? What is the likelihood that Judy Sargent lived next door to Marlene? You see, I am not, nor are any of us, that good at lining up all of these details and then have it work out perfectly.

But – OUR GOD IS!

I returned with the plant to room 104 and knocked on the door. Judy responded from inside her room “Who is it?” I told her it was Tim. She said she was coming and when she got to the door but before opening it she asked if I was the man she had just spoken with in the living room. I said yes and she opened the door. When she saw the poinsettia her face lit up with a smile – just as Marlene’s face had when first laying eyes on her poinsettia. Judy said how beautiful the plant was and I told her I was there on behalf of the church to give her this poinsettia. Again her expression of joy at the gift was one of amazement. She asked me my name again. We would exchange that question and answer about my name several times before the end of my 15 minute unplanned visit. I would not tire from that question. God was teaching me if I would just pay attention. **TRUST IN GOD! There is no need for all of the questions, or feelings of inadequacy – accept this guidance! JUST BE THERE! TRUST IN GOD!** The joyful look on Marlene and Judy’s faces from the church gift was priceless and overrode my sense of inadequacy and failure when I had left Marlene earlier.

My visit with Judy was especially marked by one statement I want to share with all of you today. When I told her the poinsettia was from the church she replied joyfully, first with a question “They remembered me? And then in the affirmative - They remembered me!” Her comments struck me like a brick. What if I had not come here today to visit Marlene? I felt too small and too stupid to explain to Judy how it was God who brought me to her on that day. Maybe I just should have said that! ***Judy - God brought me to you today because I was in too much of a rush to find out where you were living even when he planted your name in my head this morning.*** But maybe it did not matter that she know all of that. Again, Jesus was teaching me. **TRUST IN GOD. It is not in the ability of anyone to remember your name or know who you are or even the awkwardness you may feel about what to say that is important to Jesus. It is the simple act of BEING THERE which matters most.**

As I said at the start of this letter - This spiritual experience has profoundly impacted me. I felt compelled to do more than keep it to myself so I shared it with Pastor Gail and now I am sharing it with all of you – Christ’s church – We Christians – all of us, disciples of Jesus Christ.

I have an Aunt who is in an assisted living facility. She is also my Godmother. I have visited her once with my Dad and due to her Alzheimer’s disease she did not know either one of us so I have not returned. I am going to see her again. It will be awkward – She may not remember me - I may not know what to say - there may even be uneasy moments of silence - but Jesus tells me I just have to **TRUST IN GOD and be there with her.**

Jesus, thank you for the lesson.

During this New Year I encourage each person in our church to pay close attention to “experiences of coincidence” or as I call them “experiences with the holy spirit”.

What is Jesus teaching you? Praise be to God - Amen.