

7.26.2020 Trinity 7 (John 15:12-27)

Phillip Blanks is a 28-year-old security guard. He's also a retired Marine who played the position of wide receiver in high school and college football. A few weeks ago, he made the catch of his life. On July 3rd, he was at a friend's apartment when he heard frantic screaming and a commotion. He ran outside and noticed that the top floor of a nearby apartment complex was on fire and enveloped in smoke. As he approached the building, he saw a woman on the third-floor balcony, holding a child, with massive flames directly behind her. When people started yelling for the mother to drop her kids off the balcony, she lifted her son over the third-floor railing and let him go. As Phillip Blanks saw the small child falling, he ran and literally dove for him, arms out, and caught him just milliseconds before he would've hit the ground.

After the child's mother dropped her son off the balcony, she ran back into the burning building in an attempt to save her eight-year-old daughter, but the mother didn't make it out alive, and when people heard that there was a child still trapped a second heroic rescue took place. D'Artagnan (dahr-TAN-yen) Alexander was on his way to work when he heard screams and saw the flames. He immediately parked his car, ran inside the smoke-filled building, climbed up to the third floor, found the girl and carried her outside.

So here we have Phillip Blanks, a security guard who woke up on the morning of July 3rd with plans to visit a friend, but instead he caught a 3-year-old boy who was dropped off the third floor of a burning building. D'Artagnan Alexander is a barber who left his house on the same morning expecting an ordinary commute to work, but instead parked his car and ran into a burning building to save the life of an eight-year-old girl. What happened that day was so far beyond what these men expected, but we know that God wasn't surprised by those tragic events. In fact, when you read statements that these men made afterwards, it becomes clear that God had been preparing them for that day.

When interviewed, Phillip Blanks said his time in the Marines, where he was taught to "always be on high alert, not to be complacent, and to have discipline," along with his physical training as a football player, prepared him for that moment. D'Artagnan Alexander said, "I have a 3-year-old and a

9-year-old, so when I heard there were kids in there, that really hit my heart... and everything happened so fast, I didn't have time to think, my body just kicked into action and I went in." The Marines, football, the way a dad loves his kids. These are all things that the world would consider natural. The ordinary, everyday events and circumstances of our daily lives, yet when you consider that it was in and through seemingly ordinary events that these men were prepared for that extra-ordinary moment, what you discover is the objective truth that for God and His people there is no line that separates the natural from the super-natural, the ordinary from the extra-ordinary, or even the secular from the sacred.

If you were to ask Moses whether or not God prepared him to shepherd the people of Israel through what appeared to be ordinary events in his daily life, he might tell you about a thing or two he learned in the forty years he spent shepherding his father-in-law's sheep. When King Saul told a young shepherd boy named David that he didn't have a chance against a warrior like Goliath, David pointed out the fact that in his normal, daily routine as a shepherd he'd killed lions and bears, and that Goliath would be just like one of them. He said, "*The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine*" (1 Samuel 17:37). If you were to ask St. Peter about his daily life, and the everyday events that prepared him to cast a net that caught and converted 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), perhaps he'd tell you a few stories about casting nets on the Sea of Galilee.

We often look at our lives as though worship and work are two different things, that what we do on Sunday is more important to God than what we do on Monday, but each of these examples is evidence that God doesn't see it that way. Each of these examples is evidence that God is not only present in what we see as miraculous, He is truly present and at work in what we would consider the most ordinary and routine aspects of our daily lives. His mercies are "*new every morning*" (Lamentations 3:22-23), and when we see concrete evidence of God's presence in the daily lives of a security guard or a barber, when we read in Scripture about the many ways he prepared the heroes of our faith through everyday events and circumstances in their lives, we learn that it doesn't matter if we're selling insurance, stocking groceries, or driving a truck; working in our garden, having lunch with a friend, or walking with our

neighbor. In all of these things God is present and at work in us. In Him, with Him, and through Him, every moment of every day is super-natural, extra-ordinary, and sacred. Every moment is set apart for His glory.

In our New Testament reading this morning Jesus said, *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:13-15). When we consider the literal meaning of those words in the context in which they were spoken, they describe the unimaginable, perfect expression of Divine love manifested on the Cross when God in the Person of Jesus Christ freely, deliberately, and carefully laid down His life for us. This is the primary, literal meaning of that Scripture, yet when I read a thought that Oswald Chambers’ wrote about that verse, I was introduced to another perspective. He wrote, “Jesus does not ask me to die for Him, but to lay down my life for Him... If I am a friend of Jesus, I have to deliberately and carefully lay down my life for Him.”

*“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* We often read that verse only from the perspective of our Lord laying down His life for us, but with the thought in mind that we are called not to die for Him, but to lay down our lives for Him, let me ask you, as a friend of Jesus, have you deliberately and carefully laid down your life for Him? We all have a love for the heroic. We’re captivated by stories like we heard this morning, about heroes who saved children and the real hero, the mother who saved her son but didn’t survive herself. We treasure heroic moments, but deliberately and carefully laying down your life for Jesus can’t be accomplished by a single heroic act. Deliberately and carefully laying down your life for Him is a difficult and daily endeavor in which we see our jobs not as secular, but sacred; our neighbors as not just ordinary faces, but as extra-ordinary people who bear the image of God; and laying down our lives for Him means that we wake up every morning not to the daily grind, but to another opportunity to worship the Father, to glorify the Son, and to experience the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit in every aspect, every detail, and every moment of our daily lives.

*“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* God’s only Son died for you. Will you lay down your life for Him?