

## **Rev. Hope Knobler**

**Retired, Grace Lutheran Church of South Baldwin County, Gulf Shores, AL**

### **Tell us a little about yourself and how you serve.**

At the close of December, 2020, Grace and I concluded our ministry of nearly 6 years, together. We have returned to our home in Peachtree City, GA to prayerfully discern what's next. On Valentine's Day, 2021, I officially retired from parish ministry. In retirement, I want adventures in ministry like those that initially inspired my return to college in the first place; before parish life happened.

At a young age, even before I could read, I identified as both a closet, compliant Jesus freak and a shy, social nonconformist. I remain confident that *All things are possible* (Phil 4: 13) and am determined to walk to a different beat. I divorced when my daughter, Mardi, was barely 2, and single parented her into college. So, twenty years later, when parish ministry happened, it came as a "second career" choice. At the end of the string of first career choices, were the position of a Certified Radio Operator for Gwinnett County, GA Police and finally, a Youth Director at St. James Lutheran, Norcross, GA.

Besides the blessing Mardi has always been, returning to college (1981), then graduating from seminary (1991), was a great decade. The years were accentuated by time spent in the company of incredible people, from internationally renowned scholars, like Krister Stendhal, Bishop of Stockholm, to President Jimmy Carter and Bernice A. King. There was the arduous year in CPE at Scottish Rite Children's Hospital, Atlanta. And, an invitation to North Atlanta's Tri-Hospitals program to complete residency.

During the parish years, predominately, I was called to intentional ministry. I served between pastorates to assist some congregations to heal in after-pastor situations, and others to redefine the vision God sought. Overall, I served in five synods plus a UCC congregation, celebrating her 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Grace, the last call, is in a community prone to natural disasters. On behalf of Grace and in compliance with FEMA's 1<sup>st</sup> Response Preparedness, I credentialed in Chaplaincy, CISM (Crisis Incident Stress Mgt.) and NOVA (Natl. Organization for Victim Asst.). As such, I serve on the SES-LDR team; am Chaplain to Fort Morgan VFD; on team with the Florida One Crisis Response and BCVOAD (Baldwin County Volunteers Organization Active in Disaster). All being rewarding, we are considering taking up life in a motorhome to continue (1) serving in disaster and (2) realizing a retirement goal: to assist people in smaller, developing communities determine and develop sustaining economic resources from the indigenous materials available.

Some highlights in ministry for which I am most grateful: Having the distinction as the Founding Chair of the Bedford County, PA Habitat for Humanity Affiliate; Leading the Ministerium to enact an overlooked Pennsylvania legislated law which allows students one hour a week for religious study; Being the homilist at a former confirmand's ordination; Working with United Way and Family Preservation teaching families parenting skills, financial management and effectiveness training; and, working as a behavioral therapist and a Director for Mental Health/Mental Retardation with at risk and autistic children, to develop learning and coping skills. Each were made possible through a Christ who strengthens. Particularly, this shy, social nonconformist.

### **What is your favorite Bible verse and why?**

There are three. They were chosen for my ordination and informed my ministry and life:

John 4, (for its twisted irony) The story is of the woman at the well. She's a nobody and has not lived a saintly life. Even so, she is the evangelist to that community. Jesus tells her about this "living water".

Amazed, she returns to the village and tells the men. The men head out to the well. They hear Jesus repeat her news. Her evangelism is not enough for them. They can't help but turn to her and say they don't believe because of what she said, but because they heard it for themselves!

Just like her, I, too, am a sin filled nobody with a Living Water message. It matters not how one "Gets" that message as long as s/he shows up thirsty, at the spiritual well and is quenched.

2 Corinthians 4:7. "But we have this treasure in clay pots, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." We are clay pots. Our power is from God, not from ourselves. My email address is a reflection of this verse.

Finally, Ezekiel 37 - dry bones. God brings us out into the middle of the dessert and asks if these bones can live. Mortal says "I don't know God, you know." Following suit with Paul's message about "clay pots" it's God's activity working through Mortal that the bones come together and are filled with life. Likewise in John 4, it is not the physical nature of Mortal. Rather it's about Mortal sharing the message.

Each is a reflection of God at work in us. As an introvert in an extrovert's avocation, Hymns that bolster my ability to serve are: 1) *Jehovah Jaireh* (God provides), no matter the trial God's grace is sufficient for the task. 2) *Teach me Your way, O Lord*, when self-doubt imperils one's footing, God equips us and 3) *O come, O come, Emmanuel*, fills us with indisputable hope.

### **Where have you seen God recently?**

This synod has been ravaged by so many disasters, these past two years. Recently, in the midst of reaching out to the devastating thaw in Texas (our neighboring synod to the west), SES-LDR was not aware of the same happening in Jackson, MS. Even Pastor Tom Clark, who lives in the vicinity, but was removed from this crisis, was only aware that the water in Jackson was non-potable. Social media can be a two edge sword. In this case, the sword had a favorable consequence.

The Rev. Dr. Kenneth Wheeler, who grew up in Jackson, posted a concern about a family member who reported an area in Jackson that had had no running water for 3 weeks. Having recently become friends with Dr. Wheeler, less than 2 weeks prior, the concern was picked up by a SES-LDR Team Member and shared with The Rev. Stacey Parvin, Mississippi's LDR Liaison. Pr. Parvin relayed the info to Pastor Henning, Asst. to the SES Bishop and Pastor Clark. Immediately Pr. Clark contacted the City's Mayor and learned that Kroger was selling water, by the pallet, at cost. That same day, with Pastor Henning's leadership, the team authorized \$1000 in emergency funds to provide temporary assistance, until a more feasible solution can be determined. Within hours, Pr. Clark purchased the skids of water, which Kroger agreed to deliver. And, with his discount card, Pr. Clark was able to buy even more water than had been anticipated. While 5 pallets of water would not resolve the community's entire crisis, it sent a tremendous message to a desperate community. From lamentation, to supplication, to a posting on social media, to the action of God's people, God's children understood, "*My word that goes out from my mouth: does not return to me empty. It accomplishes what I desire and achieves the purpose for which I sent it*". (Is. 55: 11)

### **When/how have you been blessed by God's abundance**

It was that eighth move in five years and facing a ninth when God clearly indicated it was time to change. We are blessed. We had a place to go. We bought a house in 2001, when my parents were no longer able to manage by themselves. I chose to resign my position in Pennsylvania, modify the house and make it accessible for their needs and room enough for all of us live together. When that chapter ended, I took a call back in Pennsylvania. Now, 14 years later, we are back to rest in the tranquil place God provided when the need was there. It provides spiritual renewal from the distress of the pandemic. Even so, feeling God has more in store for us, we wholeheartedly look forward to God's next commission.

God's abundance is in God's presence and opportunities. It's not a monetary thing. Abundance is revealed in God's grace. While we did not reach the monetary comfort we had hoped, before retiring, we rest assured as God's grace will continue to provide us with sufficient to have and ample to share with those less fortunate - there will always be enough. Like the widow's oil and grain continued as long as God and Elisha had need, so too, will ours. (2 Kgs 4)