

## Reflection by the Traveling Troupe

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It is a rare occurrence for the ECW to hold their annual gathering in the southern region of our state, but given the gracious and thoughtful hosting of St. Luke's, Grants Pass, this May, they might be inclined to look south more often. The mission of the ECW is to celebrate and empower women in all of God's ministries. The women of St. Luke's lost no time in sounding that message, beginning and ending the day with a candle ceremony. One by one, three candles were lit: "On behalf of the women who have gone before, the women of today and the women of the future."

The theme of the day, The Everyday Desert, proved fruitful ground for the homilist, the keynoter, and a number of the workshop leaders. The workshops themselves were centered on meeting the spiritual challenge of our daily, dry, lonely spaces.

The Rev. Ernestine Flemister, Rector of St. Luke's, made the most of the Gospel reading (John 8:2-11) on the woman taken in adultery, immediately observing that here, yet again, was one of the Bible's nameless women. The rector's habit, she confided, when encountering one of these women is to give her a name. This woman she dubbed Gladee, a name from her own family's Liberian roots. She invited us to picture Gladee, "the Other: condemned, shamed, embarrassed. Standing alone. A desert space if I ever heard one." But, pointing to the women at the foot of the cross, quoting from the Magnificat, Rev. Flemister avowed that we are valued by God. "We experience spaces, but we do not have life in those spaces by the grace of God."

Jeanne Podolske, the Director of St. Rita's Retreat Center, gave the Keynote Address. She holds degrees in a handful of disciplines and has pursued graduate work in many of them. She is a liturgist, which allowed her to open with a joke: "What is the difference between a liturgist and a terrorist?" (Beat, beat.) "You can argue with a terrorist." Riding the laughter, she called up Jeremiah 29: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart." Not content to stop there, she reminded us of Paul's firm belief stated in II Corinthians 3 that we are being transformed by the Lord of the Spirit from glory to glory. Not, she added dryly, "from garbage to glory." It might have been at this point that she referred with some asperity to "worm theology."

With those two citations sparking through the room, Ms. Podolske (with Paul) urged us to "act with boldness." Seeming to veer off, she noted that scandal comes from a Greek word meaning a stumbling block. Jesus was referred to several times as a stumbling block. (Nope, she's still on track.) "In our desert world, we occupy a liminal space. Be bold, speak out, and rattle the cages. Be a scandalous woman. Dance for joy, work for justice, listen deeply / speak loudly. Love large...because we love Jesus. Be a scandalous woman."

As is usual with ECW Spirituality Day, there was a plentitude of workshops to choose from. They ranged from those which offered ways for the self to survive in the desert (Centering Prayer, Labyrinth Walking, Anglican Prayer Beads) and those more actively addressing the state

in which our world finds itself (Therapy Dogs, Healing Quilts, the Therapeutic Horse, Racial Reconciliation.)

The food offered was bountiful and delicious. The fellowship was warm and not enough. We were sent away with the ECW prayer that we “pray fervently, labor diligently, and give liberally to make known the power of your love.” The Everyday Desert went with us in our memories and in the words of Hana Rubens of Grants Pass, quoted here in part:

The Everyday Desert is peopled with demands  
life makes on those who walk  
a way of prayer and challenge.  
It is a pathless way  
with faith a dark lamp that shines out  
one step ahead  
of me.

Thank you, St. Luke’s, the Rev. Ernestine Flemister, Rector, and Char McCreight Diocesan ECW Board President. The day was a gift.