

Dylis Brooks

I have done so much running in the last three weeks, and my voice reflects that. But I was determined that we were going to sing something this morning. There comes a point in the life of every person, especially when you're an adult (you millennials like to say "adulting"), when you have to figure out or determine what is your life purpose. What is your meaning? And this process may be catalyzed by a variety of things. It could be a parent or a mentor. Illness. The loss of a job or the death of a loved one. These experiences in and of themselves won't determine purpose unless we spend time in reflection.

When I was in my young adult years, I thought I was pretty reflective. I would spend time in the Scriptures, and I would spend time with the Lord, and I had learned how to figure out what His voice sounded like, and I had learned how to discern what I sounded like. And I remembered the moment that I told Him I would actually do what He had been telling me to do. Which was to become a minister of the gospel in the Seventh-day Adventist church. It was very clear. He had done several things to get my attention. He had held Himself close to me while our family was assailed by the challenges of life. I remembered saying to God when we had lost our second pregnancy and our house was in foreclosure, "What do you want? I'm not cheating on my husband. I return a faithful tithe and offering. I live five blocks from the church. We are active members in the church. What do you want?" Because I knew this wasn't Satan. Because I said, I know how Satan rolls. Jesus was really close to me. And it was that press of Come. For real. For real. Follow Me. And so when I said yes, the yes meant going to seminary.

And one of the gifts of seminary for this preacher was a class that we took that challenged those of us who were going to become scholars and students of theology and Greek and Hebrew to develop spiritual habits that would cause us to remain reflective. Because the challenge is that we can spend a lot of time acquiring information and giving that information away to other people without actually utilizing it for ourselves. And so this preacher is very thankful for the spiritual formation class. I'm very thankful for the invitation to go be with Jesus like Jesus was with His Father. And so, as a result of being a reflective person, I have come to this place in my life where I realize that self-examination is part and parcel of the Christian journey. Spending time looking at yourself and figuring out if what you're doing and how you're responding to the gospel actually lines up with the gospel is important. It's not something you should skip. Reflection is actually a sign of spiritual maturity. It's actually a sign of mature thinking. If you want to know if you're a grownup, do you think before you do something? Do you reflect on the consequences of what you did the last time? I think they say that repetition deepens the impression. But they also say that craziness, I'm sorry, insanity, is what? Doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results. So reflection is a mark of maturity as adult human beings and in faith.

So, I can't remember if it was Alex Bryan or Japhet DiOliveira, but I had decided to finally listen to Randy Roerts and start listening to books. When Randy Roberts told me this year, I was like, "I'm not listening to a book. I'm a bad girl. I'm going to have my book with my pages. I'm going to feel them in my hands." And then I moved over to the Kindle. Swipe it. And I remember this summer I was heading to Perth to preach, and, you know, Alex and Japhet and Tim and all of them was out there reading a book. All right? And so I said, "Hey, I want to try Audible. What's a good book to read?" And I can't remember who it was that said to me, "Read the book, The Road to Character by David Brooks." I walked up and down one

of the streets in Perth listening to this book while I was there that summer. Now, David works as a columnist for the New York Times, and he wrote this book, and he uses a pair of terms, resume virtues and obituary virtues, to describe the manner in which we live our life. He proposes that resume virtues are those that are valued in the contemporary marketplace. High test scores achieved by a student, the professional accomplishments pulled off by an adult. And they are skills that are met with bigger paychecks and public approbation. The opposite of that, though, is your eulogy virtues. And these are the aspects of our character that others praise when a person isn't around to hear it. And they could be like humility, kindness, bravery, generosity. Our society exalts resume virtues. But Brooks argues that it overlooks the humbler eulogy virtues. And he writes that, "We know in our core that it's the eulogy virtues, those values, are what matter the most."

When I was asked to choose a character in Scripture that I relate to personally, I had recently completed reading through John's gospel, his letters to the church, and a few chapters in Revelation. So it was a slam dunk for me. I knew exactly what I was going to talk about. And that would be John. I have often sensed an abiding connection with the impetuous Peter. I've identified with both Mary and Martha, you know, this is the girls, striving to sit at the feet of Jesus while serving my family and others. However, this morning, I publicly confess, I've met my doppelganger. And his name is John.

So let's look at John's resume, or his resume virtues. He's the second son of Zebedee from the region of Galilee. He's a fisherman by trade. Disciple of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He's a disciple of John the Baptizer. He's one of twelve who follow Jesus to become fishers of men. He's one of three who made up Jesus' inner circle. He's one half of a dynamic duo that Jesus nicknamed Sons of Thunder. Can you tell why I like him? It is the appellation, "Son of Thunder" that I find myself connecting with most this morning as we gather for our last time in this context. Why thunder? Perhaps John and his brother were choleric, bold, brash. Perhaps he spoke with authority when he shared the gospel or defended the kingdom of God. Perhaps they were linked with the zealots or he demonstrated, he and his brother, that they had volatile personalities. Perhaps these were the guys that you wanted to go with you when you were making a run. Because you know, if somebody started something, they could finish it. Ya'll don't know nothing about that life. That's all right. In a few instances in the Gospel, we get a glimpse or a hint that John and his brother were both opportunistic and ambitious. They wanted to be seated at the right hand of Jesus in His kingdom. Mark 10:35-45. He wants to call down fire from heaven to consume those that were not receptive to Jesus' message. Luke 9:54.

At the Last Supper, though, we find John reclining next to Jesus. So we see that there's another side to him. At the end of his ministry, we can discern something else about John. When we look at the book of John, we recognize that he captured, more than all the other gospel writers, the heart of God. The verse that we find foundational to why we believe what we believe is found in the book of John. Say it with me. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Right? John writes about love more than the authors of the synoptics. And just in case you think he's perfect, let's be clear. He was a work in progress. Some commentators even think that John's love seems to have limits. Because he appears to have a laser focus for those who are believers and not so much for those who are on the fringe on the outside.

I find myself drawn to John because I just finished this two-year experience of reflection with God. And I've been going through some training that chaplains go through called "Clinical Pastoral Education," and one of the things you have to do is reflect. You reflect all the time. You reflect on what you say and what you do. Then you write reflection papers and share with other people. Then you listen to people reflect on you. My, my, my. A lot of reflection. And I have come to the realization that I am more like John than I want to admit. Because I am a daughter of thunder. Yeah, it was a revelation. Right? I know. For real. Like I didn't know I was a daughter of thunder? And I could call it passion. But I had a moment of clarity, Patti, when I was watching the Avengers, and yeah, and um. You know how somebody was asking Bruce Banner, "How do you just, like, go from this to this?" And he never answered in that scene when they were in the building and he's on, like a chair, \_\_\_\_\_, when he's about to run off or something, and he goes from Bruce Banner to boom, the Hulk, and he goes, "I'm always angry." Yes! That's me! I'm always angry. \_\_\_\_\_ Why are you all laughing? No, serious. I got all this anger, and that was really hard for me to accept, and it was a reflection process. This time in Scripture, this time with God, showed me who I really was. That for me, anger is the place that I show up. Anger is the place where I will do the most damage. I won't lie. I won't steal. You know. I won't even talk about you behind your back, because I don't like it. People have been doing that to me for a long time. I'd rather confront you (laughter). In love. I heard what you said. Right? Cause I know what it's like when people take your name and take statements about you and then go on, and this was before Facebook. Because the Adventist grapevine listens. You just drop a word over here, and it gets from the East Coast to the West Coast in a matter of a minute. Word of mouth with Facebook and all the social media opportunities that are out there.

So I've come to the realization that I am a son of thunder. I've come to the realization that I am like Samson. Give me the jawbone of an ass. I will knock them down. Real talk. And what John has taught me is this. That proximity to Jesus doesn't always lead to immediate change. Transformation takes time. Do you hear me? It takes time. And it takes work. It takes being honest about who you really are and being willing to tell people. And let me tell you what I've learned most from John. Because John knew that he was loved by God. And Jesus did not choose him and call him the beloved. Jesus accepted him as he was, and as a result of his relationship with Jesus, he became more and more like Jesus. So, then why do we keep wanting people to be like Jesus the moment they meet Jesus? Why are we so impatient with one another? And let's be clear. We're all in this together. There is no heaven that only has young adults. Help me, somebody. There is no heaven that only has people that look like you, talk like you, believe like you, that grew up in the same place you grew up, that went to the same Adventist college that you went to, that worked in the same organization that you went to!

When Jesus calls John to follow Him, He knows everything about John. We have the opportunity to look back over the experience. But Jesus knows everything about him. He knows that he is as loyal as he is thunderous. He knows that he will stick with him to the end. He also knows he's competitive and jealous. Him and Peter for alpha. I'm going to get there first. No, let me get there first. Don't be confused. John was a work in progress just like we are works in progress. John was a son of thunder. And he was God's beloved.

The first One Project, we were in Atlanta. Sat a table with people I've never met before. I was so fascinated because I hadn't figured out how they got us to sit there. And I was sitting, and I met people from all over the planet. And there was a young man there, Bobby Bozel

(spelling?), who was from England but pastoring in the Netherlands, and I remember listening to his record, and there was a line from one of his songs that has stuck with me, and he says, "I'm fully known by God, and I'm fully loved by God. And there's nothing you can do to stop it." So when I stand here this morning and I tell you who I am, well some of you already knew who I was, but I just came to the realization that I am who I am. It's OK if we don't agree. It's OK if you don't like me. It's OK if I cause you a little frustration and agitation. You do too. But you know what's not OK? It's not OK for you to marginalize me or for me to marginalize you. It's not OK for me to shut your story down. It is not OK for me to cause you, by the words I use, to feel as if you don't belong in the community.

So what are the implications for us as Christian Seventh-day Adventists who say we love Jesus? If we're going to be thunderous, let's be thunderous together about the things that really matter. Can we be thunderous in the disapproval of racism and sexism and gender bias and the marginalization of every person that could be identified, \_\_\_\_\_, as a Samaritan? Whoever you think a Samaritan is, I hope you will raise your voice, and you will speak loudly. And if you're an introvert and you can't speak loudly, write a check (applause). We need to be thunderous in the disapproval of these things happening not only outside but inside the trinity of faith. We must be thunderous in the \_\_\_\_\_ talk about immigrants, LBQT+, and human trafficking, and the stop and frisk policy, and sexual harassment, \_\_\_\_\_, and healthcare, and education. We have to! All of us have to! And we have to be thunderous in our love for each other. Boomers, Gen-X'rs, and millennials. We have to! We're not going to heaven with this mess. We're talking about the signs of the times. Because John tells us that people will know who we are when we love. Not when we have it right. Not when we write declarations. Not when we exclude but when we love. And those of us who aren't treated in a loving way, turn the other cheek. Sit. That's what Japhet DiOliveira taught me. People come against you and come for you. Just say, "Can we have a meal?" Talk. Because that's what love does.

Good things come to an end. Pentecosts happen so that people can be dispersed with the gospel. The One Project must end. Because this isn't heaven, ya'll. I know for the last seven years, coming together has been a good experience. But this isn't it. I hope that they would say about me that Dilys Brooks loved Jesus with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength. I hope they say she's bold, courageous, thunderous, passionate, bold, daring, loyal, dependable. And I also hope they say, Dilys loved people with the love that she has received from Jesus.