

Rev. Dr. Anne Bain Epling
First Presbyterian Church
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Acts 9:36-43
Ordination/Installation Sunday

“Get Up!”

I’m guessing I’m not the only one here who watched the papal conclave with interest and was pleasantly surprised to hear the new pope is an American! I’m not sure what’s better – the fact that there’s an American Pope or that he’s not a Cubs fan. As a St. Louis Cardinals fan, I was especially pleased to hear Pope Leo’s brother confirm that news.

But in all seriousness, one of the stories in the lead up to the conclave that I most enjoyed hearing was the story of **Raniero (rah-nee-AIR-no) Mancinelli (mon-chi-NELL-ee)**. Mancinelli is the Italian tailor who has made vestments for the last three popes. At 85 years old, he’s been a tailor since he was 15. His small workshop in Rome is just a few steps from St. Peter’s Basilica, and framed pictures of Mancinelli with various popes hang on the walls of his shop.

Prior to the conclave, Mancinelli told the National Catholic Reporter about seeing two cardinals, one American and one Eastern European, who were sporting new red cassocks. Mancinelli said to them, 'Your Eminence, what if you then become pope? And they said, 'But no, there's no risk!' However, when cardinals visited his shop -- some for a new collar, some for a button -- Mancinelli said no to all of them: "Let's wait until after the conclave" he said. "I wouldn't want one of them to become pope with a newly sewn gold button."

It's with that same humility and grace that he said, "I don't just sew clothes. I serve the Church. I want every stitch to honor God."

Raniero Mancinelli, tailor to the pope . . . using what he has (skills, time, and faithfulness) to do what he can to serve God.

Today we meet another person who also used what she had, to do what she could, to serve God. And like Mancinelli, she did it with thread and a thimble.

Her name is Tabitha, or Dorcas in Greek. She sewed clothing for the widows of Joppa; and “she was devoted to good works and acts of charity,” (v. 36b). The fact that we’re told her Aramaic and Greek name is a clue that Tabitha wasn’t just some ordinary seamstress; she was likely a pillar of the church and well respected in her community. We also know she was a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ. In fact, Tabitha is the only woman, *the only woman*, in the entire New Testament, to be referred to as a disciple. So she’s important.

Which could explain why her congregation sends two witnesses to tell Peter she has died, and he needs to come right away to bring her back to life. So Peter heads straight to Tabitha’s home; he knows the situation is urgent. For you see, Tabitha didn’t just sew; she sewed for the needy and widows; i.e. people who may not have much to wear if it weren’t for Tabitha’s good works. In fact, when Peter arrives at Tabitha’s bedside, all the women who greet him are wearing clothes Tabitha had sewn.

But Peter witnessed more than women in tunics, he witnessed women who were grieving because Tabitha’s death meant their own death as well. As they surrounded Peter, he could see they were literally clothed in her compassion. Who would help them now that she was gone?

This is an amazing episode in the life of the early church. And standing there, Peter no doubt remembered an experience he had with Jesus in Mark chapter 5 when a little girl had died. Seeing all the commotion and crying, Jesus also told the people to go outside, and then with Peter, James and John watching, Jesus took the little girl by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha kum!’ (which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’). Now, this time, Peter changes just one letter and says, “Tabitha, kum!” and Tabitha got up!

Friends, does God not call us to do the same? To get up, and use what we have, to do what we can, to be builders of God’s kingdom? You know, sometimes we think we need incredible gifts to build the kingdom, or lots of

resources, or lots of time, or education or smarts. But Tabitha's story, or **Raniero (rah-nee-AIR-no) Mancinelli's (mon-chi-NELL-ee) story**, show us that we don't. Sometimes, all we need is a needle and thread.

And notice, too, that neither of them waited for permission. Nor did they ask whether it was enough. They simply offered their gifts—thread and fabric, time and compassion—for the sake of others. And in doing so, both became a vital presence in their community. Not flashy. Not formal. Just faithful.

And this is the kind of quiet, devoted ministry we are celebrating today.

In just a few minutes, we'll witness the ordination and installation of new elders and deacons. And while they may not all be seamstresses, they are Tabithas—each of them. They have seen the needs of this congregation and responded with what they have: their wisdom, their time, their prayers, and their leadership. They have said yes to serving Christ's church—not because it was convenient or because it was “their turn,” but because the Spirit nudged, and they listened.

And I'm guessing it took courage for them to answer God's call to serve, because this isn't about filling a slot. This is a call. A spiritual, Spirit-filled call. We often say, “God doesn't call the equipped. God equips the called.” And today is living proof of that.

These leaders—your elders and deacons—have gotten up, just like Tabitha. They have stepped forward. They have said “yes.” And I want to say “Thank you. You are vital. You are important. We could not do it with you.”

Friends, when people show up, say yes, and offer what they have—time, wisdom, prayer, service – they're using what they have, to do what they can, to build God's kingdom. And while saying yes can feel simple, it's rarely easy. Because we know that saying yes means planting ourselves in uncertain soil, and it means committing to work that doesn't always have immediate results.

This reminds me of a story I return to when the needs feel overwhelming, and the call may feel too big.

There once was a woman who wanted peace in the world. Her world seemed to be falling apart. The headlines were heavy. The problems too big.

One day she went shopping at the mall, hoping to clear her mind, and she wandered into a small store. To her surprise, Jesus was behind the counter.

She finally got up the nerve to ask, “Excuse me, are you Jesus?”

“I am,” he said.

“Do you work here?”

“No,” Jesus said. “I own the store.”

“Oh! So... what do you sell here?”

“Just about everything,” he replied. “Take a walk through the aisles. See what you want. Then come back and we’ll talk.”

So she did. She walked up and down the aisles and saw all kinds of things: peace on earth, no more war, harmony in families, racial healing, care for the planet, justice for the poor. She wrote furiously. By the time she returned to the counter, she had a long list.

Jesus looked it over, smiled, and said, “No problem.” Then he bent down behind the counter and brought out little packets.

“What are these?” she asked.

“Seed packets,” he said. “This is a catalog store. You don’t get the finished product here. Just the seeds. You have to plant them, nurture them, and help them grow.”

“Oh,” she said—and walked out without buying anything.

Friends, Tabitha, Raniero Mancinelli, and the people we ordain and install today, have said yes to the slow, sacred work of planting. Yes to prayer and presence, to service and leadership. Yes to the Kingdom work that doesn’t always come with quick results—but comes stitch by stitch, seed by seed, prayer by prayer, and always bears fruit in time.

So we plant what we’ve been given, and tend to what God is growing. This is our calling—and not just for those being ordained today, but for all of us.

To get up. To say yes.

To do what we can with what we have.

And to trust that God will take it—and make it grow.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.