October 5, 2025

Let me start out by saying how happy I am to be here with you this morning. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Deacon Liz Good. I spent 4 years here at St. Andrew's, from 2013 to 2017. Many of you who are here now I know, and I see many I don't know. People I used to see – some of whom encouraged me in my ministry – are no longer among us. Such is the passage of time!

It seems fitting that I should be here as we celebrate St. Francis and bless the animals. I have been active in our diocese's Creation Care initiatives. Before my ordination in 2013 I spent time working on diocesan Green grants and loans, sending out applications and helping to evaluate them when they came in. I helped to establish the observance of the Season of Creation, working with the late Bishop Bud Cederholm and some others, and was part of the original steering committee for the Creation Care Justice Network. Until the end of last year, I edited and sent out the monthly newsletter, Creation Care Justice News. So you can see that Creation Care is near and dear to my heart!

Just a little bit more about me: As I mentioned, I was ordained in 2013. For the last 11 years I have worked for Father Bill's & MainSpring, the nonprofit that provides the homeless shelters in Quincy and Brockton. Until recently, I worked as

a case manager, working with people who have moved out of the shelter and into permanent supportive housing. At the end of August I retired from full-time work and am currently working part time in a back-office job.

So my 2 primary ministries have been supporting Creation Care and helping people experiencing homelessness.

That's enough about me – now let's look at today's scriptures.

This morning, I was particularly struck by the reading from the first letter to Timothy. This letter is attributed to Paul, although scholars debate whether Paul actually wrote it. Timothy was a young disciple and colleague of Paul, who was leading the church in Ephesus. The letter is full of support and advice for Timothy.

At the very beginning, Paul talks about Timothy's faith, faith that Timothy learned and received from his grandmother Lois and then his mother Eunice. Think about it. We're still talking about very early days of the church, and yet Timothy is already part of a third generation of followers of Jesus in his family.

This is a reminder that we don't travel our faith journey alone. We are accompanied by others – those who have gone before and those who are with us now. Some of the fellow travelers on our faith journey are part of our biological family. Some of them are friends and acquaintances. Look around you at your

church family – fellow travelers on your faith journey. We are all surrounded by what the letter to the Hebrews calls a cloud of witnesses – people who've gone before, people who are with us now.

Before our reading from the letter to Timothy, we heard 2 pieces from the book of Lamentations. We started out with the beginning of the book of Lamentations, and then in place of a psalm we sang another portion of the same book. The book of Lamentations was written in the time after Babylon conquered Jerusalem, destroyed it, and took a large number of the residents to Babylon as captives. In Lamentations, the city of Jerusalem is personified as a woman, Daughter Zion. She has been made to suffer because of the sins of the people – she's been abused and now weeps. Then in the Canticle, we sang about God's faithfulness. At the end of the service, we will be singing one of the great hymns based on this same part of Lamentations – Great Is Thy Faithfulness.

The book of Lamentations is notable for showing the many ways of reacting to trauma. After the narrator describes the traumas that Daughter Zion has undergone, Daughter Zion herself speaks. The book becomes a kind of dialogue between the narrator and Daughter Zion. She expresses the feelings of the people who have seen their homes and their temples destroyed and who have become

captives in a strange place. She describes a number of feelings, including grief, anger, and acceptance.

I'm going to get personal here and tell you why I related so strongly to the readings from Timothy and Lamentations.

Recently, I had a health scare. I'm happy to say that matters are being dealt with. I have a shiny new pacemaker – I think it's shiny; I haven't actually seen it. I will be having more tests and procedures, but we're on top of everything and it's all working out OK. I love getting older!

Before we knew what was going on – when we knew that there was a problem but didn't know yet what it was – I had Great Is Thy Faithfulness stuck in my head. Actually it was a really annoying earworm. I had no idea where it came from; I hadn't heard or sung that hymn for a long time. But I couldn't get it out of my head. At the same time, my thoughts kept going to my grandmother, who has been gone for more than 40 years. Grandma was in many ways ahead of her time. She had a strong call to preach but knew it would be impossible for her as a woman. She created and taught courses in comparative religion and was an active church woman. If the Episcopal Church had ordained women earlier, she would have been first in line at seminary. As it was, very late in her life she was able to preach as a lay preacher.

Clearly, my grandmother is a major player in my cloud of witnesses.

As I was dealing with my medical problems, I went back and forth with all the feelings that Daughter Zion expresses: grief, anger, you name it. In the end, of course, acceptance. All with Great Is Thy Faithfulness stuck in my head. Right now, there's a copy of LEVAS on my piano open to that hymn. It reminds me – and maybe you – that whatever we are going through, we know that God is always there, a faithful witness.

Timothy's cloud of witnesses – including his mother and grandmother – were there to help him in his ministry. When we meet someone experiencing trauma – as Daughter Zion did – we can accompany them as they go through their various feeling and emotions. We can be part of their cloud of witness.

Look around you again. You are all part of each other's faith journey. As a church family, you laugh with each other in times of joy, you help each other in times of trouble. If there's trauma, the church family is there. That kind of faithfulness is worth singing about, isn't it??

Thanks be to God!