

Thank you for this opportunity to tell what God has done and to thank you all as a group for being there from the beginning with your financial, volunteer, culinary and most of all, your prayer support. I spent some of the happiest years of my church life here at St. Francis. Thank you for all that.

Prayer: That my words may glorify God and not anyone else for truly this is His work.

Caroline emailed me back in December that your series would be on God's call in our lives and I have recently have been thinking of His call to several biblical characters.

I thought of Abraham and how, in the midst of total paganism, God told him to pick up and go to a foreign country. God's command took up verses 1 through 3 of Genesis 12. In verse 4 at age 75, Abraham was on his way. No muss. No fuss.

Then there was Moses who wasn't quite so easy. “Why me? “ “What if they don't listen to me?” “ You know I can't give speeches,” he complained to God. Our gracious God performed a few miracles, got angry at him, made him a few promises and Moses was launched after a couple of chapters of haggling.

Isaiah had a vision which led to conviction of his sin: “Woe is me. I am undone!” He actually saw his own unworthiness, he confessed, was cleansed and then he was commissioned: “Here am I, send me.”

Then what about Jonah?! That poor guy—after 4 agonizing chapters, he's still sitting under a tree arguing with God!

Isn't the Bible just fun to read?

I can't leave Mary out. The angel visited her with the greatest news of all time—she would give birth to the Messiah. Mary could have said no...

Saul got whacked . In his spiritual and physical blindness, he asks “Who are you, Lord?” Then off he went. Oops. Maybe he wasn't so blind after all. Somewhere between the saddle and the ground, he “saw” Who whacked him.

But best of all was John the Baptist who leaped for joy in his mother's womb when the

pregnant Mary entered the room. He was a quick study.

So everyone's call looks different. I look forward to hearing all the stories in heaven. What a way to pass the ages giving glory to God!

You will remember a few weeks ago on I-65 when the van full of Mennonites was hit by the truck and eleven people were killed. The spokesman for the grieving Mennonite group spoke to the press: This is a horrible tragedy but we must remember that today we "see through a glass darkly", that through all this tragedy God is at work weaving His beautiful tapestry which we will one day see. He will use and even is using this for His own glory.

God has been at work weaving the West End School tapestry since before the beginning of time. He has not weaved it out of Blair tragedy necessarily but perhaps tragedy in the lives of some of our boys. Today I will not dwell on their lives but will try to trace a few of the threads of Robert's, Carrie's and my life as I seek to glorify God by identifying some of His careful work through the years.

So here we find ourselves in Louisville, KY in a boarding school for inner city middle school boys. Some have fathers or mothers or siblings in prison and/or on drugs. Most have no father in the home; some don't even know who dad is. Many are churched. All are angry. Some are being raised by infirm, aging grandmothers or siblings or single moms.

So how did God prepare these old, unremarkable white people to run a boarding school for kids like this? Well, I say this tongue in cheek: He wove and is weaving the tapestry, promised He'd be there for us and, wisely, neglected to give us the details . I think He knew that if we knew what He knew, we'd never go!  
And I was wagging my finger at Jonah!?

I was raised in a Christian home the only girl with three brothers and not a female to be found in the neighborhood. That was fine with me since I never met a girl I liked til high school. I LOVED boys! Boys were daring, they were irreverent, they were humorous, they did interesting things. They climbed trees, they played sports from morning til night. They did all the things I liked to do. So weave a necessary thread called LOVE-for- who-and-what-boys-are.

My mother, the local school nurse, brought into our home pre-adolescent boys who needed safety and stability. There were many pitfalls. All boys are not Michael Oher of "The Blind Side". In fact, he's the exception. Weave in threads of compassion and experience.

I always wanted to be rich and famous and I wanted a dozen kids—if they were all boys that would be fine with me. I can't tell you my shock when our Katherine was born. I assumed my quiver would be full of males. Anyway, God had to deal with me about the rich and famous part—That was all about greed and pride and I was a particularly hard case. He had to knock me out at the knees.

What was I saying about Jonah?

Weave in some ugly threads. God's still working on my pride and greed-- among other things.

After years of prayer, God brought Robert and me together in a relationship (I hate to say this) of two golden retrievers. You know, pretty easy to get along with and generally okay with the cards they've been dealt. Not the pit bull type (although I have noticed some pit bull qualities in Robert from time to time...) Well, as it turns out, in this boarding school life, there's not a lot of time for bad moods or disagreements or displeasure with each other. God has given us the greatest gift of a solid marriage. Our uncomplicated, trusting relationship allows us time to try to meet the needs of thirteen boys.

Weave the gift of a solid marriage into the tapestry.

I can remember telling God early on about the mate He would choose for me:

#1 No teachers (Can't be rich and famous) #2 No preachers (Can't be rich and famous) #3 And please, God, above all-- no redheads!! He sent me all three in Robert.

Weave into the tapestry never-underestimate-God's-sovereignty-or-His-sense-of-humor.

Many of you will remember Bob Coon in TBS when he talked about God's call on our lives: “Now don't think that if you say yes to God He'll send you off to Africa. That's not going to happen...” he'd say. Fifty yards from West End School is a plaque erected by the African-American Heritage Foundation. It says; “This area of Louisville is known as “Little Africa”.

God's humor again.

While we were praying and waiting and working, two and a half years passed with no real progress toward finding a location for the School.

I was in a group here at St. Francis studying Henry Blackaby's “Experiencing God”. Robert and I were getting antsy because it was November and we still hadn't

found a place to grow a school. We had made an apparently laughable offer on a site in the West End and were turned down in less time than you can turn around.

Henry Blackaby said that if where you are looking is not working, then go where the Holy Spirit is working. Robert had been invited to a men's group which wanted to start a school in the West End but a boarding school was no part of their vision. Literally, two weeks before our drop dead date when we knew we had to abandon ship, Rev Awkard of New Zion Baptist Church approached Robert with the news that he had a building that could accommodate a boarding school.

What we did not know at the time and what God knew was that in five years that beautiful old school building on the National Register of Historic Places would be handed over to us!

Big bold thread in the tapestry.

Robert, of course, is the visionary in all this –or at least the human visionary. The final caste of his calling was somewhat of an epiphany.

Robert's youth was spent in Newton, MA and in Spartanburg, SC where his family moved during his high school years and where he made many observations about life in the segregated South. Most formative, though, as far as West End School is concerned has been Robert's life since coming to Louisville. He had an opportunity to see the progress that the at-risk Summerbridge students made in their six weeks of summer school. But he understood their need for more than a summer of studies.

Robert himself had been a “reluctant” high school student whose grades left so much to be desired that no college wanted him in spite of his respectable SAT scores. How would God weave this into the tapestry? Well, Robert had a dad who was aware of a last resort—a PG year at a boarding school in New Hampshire. He got another chance at success, something West End School boys don't get: there is no dad to say why don't we try this or that. When they fall down in the third grade or fourth grade or fifth grade, there is no second chance.

Robert went on to enroll in college and thirteen years later, after a four year stint in the US Navy and other interesting diversions, he received his degree. (Parents who decry their child's decision to take a “gap year” after high school and before college, do not get a sympathetic ear from Robert.)

While we were dating, Robert told me he thought he'd like to teach high school history (God, I thought I made it clear..) so seventy-eight hand-typed letters of application later and one opening, Robert met with the headmaster of The Asheville School at Logan

Airport in Boston.

“We have a position for a government teacher at our boarding school” Have you any teaching experience?

No

Have you ever coached a sport?

“No.”

Have you ever done any camp work?”

“No.”

Have you ever been to camp?

No

Have you any brothers and sisters?

No.

So you see what a great God we serve. Even when no is the answer to every question, Robert still got hired. That's God making something out of nothing!

It was at The Asheville School that we came to realize how a good boarding school experience can shape lives. The boarding school thread must be substantial in the tapestry.

Back to Louisville 1991: We arrived in Louisville with Robert as Headmaster at KCD. We'd been here for two months when Vernon Robertson, Catholic priest extraordinaire, took Robert for a drive through the West End where the Catholic church was abandoning their schools one by one. Vernon openly criticized his church for closing the schools.

Weave into the tapestry the need for good schools in the West End.

In 1993 as part of the Leadership Louisville program, Robert spent a night in a patrol car in the West End. They were called to an apartment where a 12 year old boy had pulled a knife on his mother. While the officer was in the next room with mom filling out paperwork, Robert sat on the couch with the boy. He was an ordinary 12 year old boy who, due to the circumstances of his life, already had two strikes against him. “What will happen to him?” Robert asked the policeman once back in the car. “He'll end up dead or in prison” came the reply.

Later that night, they were called to one of the housing projects in the West End to investigate a drug exchange in operation. The officer pulled up on the grass, left the car with his door open, the motor running and telling Robert to stay in the car. He then disappeared around the corner of the building. As Robert sat in the cruiser waiting for him to return, a young man approached the car. Soon there were four or five youths standing around wondering who Robert was , why he was wearing a tie (was he the

detective?) and what was he doing there. An eternity later the officer returned to the cruiser and off they drove.

Robert vividly remembers as dawn was breaking, driving across town to our rented farmhouse surrounded by 500 pastoral acres in Prospect. He thought of the profound contrast between the lives of the boys he had just left and those of the kids he encountered daily at KCD.

Here are some startling statistics which helped propel him forward:

39% of African American males graduate from high school in Jefferson County.

An African-American male who has a father or sibling in prison has a 7 in 10 chance of going to prison himself.

Epiphany complete. Weave it into the tapestry.

In a parallel universe in the cotton fields of Alabama, God was raising up an unusual person who has become my sister, my mother, my mentor, my best friend. At West End School she teaches, counsels, recruits, directs the Summerbridge program, cooks...you name it. Carrie Peterson is wise beyond her years. She has raised four boys well. She wants to be remembered as a servant and God's servant she is. She is continually open to God's whispers and, like Abraham, she goes at the drop of a hat with no thought of self. She wasn't always like that she says.

She came to Louisville on her own at the age of 17. She tells the story of being downtown on a busy street when an unkempt blind man asked her to help him cross the street. She took one look at him, saw his filth and crossed alone. She took a few steps on her way, was convicted by the Holy Spirit and decided to go back to help him. As she turned, she saw him crossing the street on someone else's arm. At that moment, she knew that God had had a job for her to do, she had refused Him and He found someone else. Carrie lives her life in the knowledge that God does not need her or anyone else for anything. With her or without her, He will accomplish His purposes. But He accords each of us the dignity of choosing whether or not we will go.

Weave Carrie and all her extraordinary experiences and sensibilities into the tapestry.

And finally...

If you want to be blessed and you want to live a fulfilled life, ask God for a job you can't possibly do. (Notice I didn't say "happy life". God isn't interested in our happiness, only our obedience.)

Isn't it Oprah 4:11 that says: God never gives us more than we can handle.

I'm here to tell you that IF He never gives us more than we can handle, how will we ever know Him or His power and grace.

Read the Sermon on the Mount to see if He's given us more than we can handle.

It's why He died.

Whether we realize it or not, God is weaving our lives into His beautiful tapestry. Everyone is unique. Follow the threads of your life and see how God has taken all your faults and inadequacies along with all your “good efforts” and used them for His glory. What a great God we serve!

What's in your tapestry...?