

SERMON 838

Second Week in Lent

March 19, 2014

937th Week as Priest

763rd Week at St Dunstan's

28th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

REMEMBERING DOT HARRIS

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's a wonderful thing to grow up in a large family, with lots of brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles—especially when you grow up in a small town, where everybody knows you and you know them too. Dot was a Biggers, and she grew up with four sisters—Patsy, June, Virginia, and Juanita—and a brother, Charles, named after their father, but everybody called him “Buck.”

When they were coming along, life was all about Friday night football games, and going to the picture show on Saturday morning, and the Christmas parade, and long hot summer days, and going to church every Sunday. There were chores mixed in with all that, and school, and a thousand other small duties demanded of those who belong to the human race.

Life can be very good in Tallassee, Alabama, even if times are hard, and you don't have a lot of money and there's trouble in the

world—but life can still be very good, because a family sticks together, and we love each other no matter what.

Hard work is a large part of what makes a person's effort in life count for something. Dot Biggers and Thurman Harris (or as his close friends and family have always called him, "Gaston,") grew up together and somewhere along the line they fell in love, and got married when they were still teenagers, and raised a family themselves right here in Tallassee.

Gaston worked in the cotton mill for more than a half a century, until he was seventy-two, and a man once told him he was the best worker the mill ever had. And I don't doubt that for a minute. Dot was a kindergarten teacher at the Little Red School House for years and years. She loved those children just like they were her very own.

Dot and Gaston raised their own boys, Donnie and Mark, and helped raise their grandchildren, and their great grandchildren. They bought a house, and had a garden every summer, and they paid their bills on time, and they were loved and respected by their family, their friends, and their neighbors. Dot and Gaston were the salt of the earth, and they always have been. They have influenced hundreds of lives for good, and as Saint Paul said, they have lived a life that was worthy and pleasing to God.

My wife Leigh and I came to the Church of the Epiphany back in the summer to fill in after their priest left to be closer to his grown children and their families. We found a beautiful little church and an

even more beautiful congregation of people who loved the Lord Jesus Christ and each other.

Two of our members, Jere van Etten and Jean Kerr, told me about Dot and Thurman, who had been coming to church for many years, but Dot lately had had some health problems. They took me by to see them on a Sunday afternoon in the early Fall, and I fell in love with them too. Jere and Jean were very faithful in visiting the Harrises each week.

Life is very good in a small town in the South, where you get to know people well, and you really care about them. Dot was such a sweet and gentle lady, with a kindness about her and a good sense of humor. Gaston was completely devoted to her, and they had a wonderful marriage of sixty-five years.

I'm wondering today what could be of more importance in life than living in a place you love, raising a family, loving your friends and neighbors, and doing good whenever and wherever you can.

The poet William Wordsworth wrote two hundred years ago that the "best part of a good man's life are his small, unremembered acts of kindness and of love." Not worldly success, or wealth or power—but acts of kindness and of love. Dorothy Ann Harris's life was filled to overflowing with kindness and love. It was, as Jesus said, abundant life.

And this, dear friends, is precisely what I wish for you:
Abundant life, filled with loving relationships, dear friends, family

reunions, Easter and Christmas holidays, hard work, the smell of fresh-cut grass on a summer evening, homemade ice cream, rocking on the porch, a boat ride on the river, a rare snow in February, the first signs of spring in yellow jonquils and redbud trees, a new baby coming home from the hospital, and a grandmother who loves you so much that she will take care of your little boy Zachary while you finish nursing school.

One day we will all be together again. One day, we will be in the courts of heaven, with the saints in light, with angels and archangels, with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And we will be filled with the joy and power of the Holy Spirit. And Dot will be there to greet us, and to welcome us home—with her sweet smile and warm hug, and with a heart overflowing with kindness and love.

You can say that life is more important than these common things, these everyday ways of living, but I honestly doubt you'll convince me otherwise. This life is a journey best made together, surrounded by those you love and those who love you. There are certainly times of great difficulty, sadness and sorrow, and even tragedy, but for the most part, in the great scheme of things, life is what you make it—and for Dot and Gaston, life was about hard work and no small amount of suffering—but it was mainly about joy, and peace, and patience. Kindness, and goodness, and gentleness. Faithfulness, and most of all, love.

Dot, these people all loved you, and we know that we will see you again. **AMEN.**

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