

Epiphany 4C
Luke 4: 21-30
31 January 2010
Christ Church

A remarkable thing happened to me this week. I'd like to share it with you.

A year ago Christmas, my family closed up our old home place in Virginia. We spent several days going through our parents' personal effects.

Among those were my mother's rosary and a pewter thimble that was given her when she and my father were first married. I treasure them, because they were both of great personal value to my mother. The rosary and the thimble bring my mom's face before me in an instant.

As we removed my parents' belongings from the house where I grew up, I tucked them both in a small purse that a friend had given me and brought them back to Atlanta.

I haven't thought about my mom's thimble in over a year.

However, I've been thinking of my mother a lot lately. I miss her. It's still hard, sometimes, to believe she's gone.

This past Thursday, I went grocery shopping at Ingles. I came out of the store and walked to my car to load up the groceries. My mother's thimble was lying on the passenger seat.

I was astounded when I saw the thimble. How could it have gotten there? It made me feel that my mom was very close. I teared up as I drove home. I couldn't help but wonder if my mother was communicating something to me. Was it the pact we had made years ago that whoever died first would come back to let the other know she was okay? Was this my mother's way of letting me know?

I was so moved by the discovery of the thimble that I spent the remainder of the evening pondering its meaning. A friend who is visiting asked me over dinner what my mother used the thimble for? "For mending," I said. (She never had

time for big sewing projects) And then it hit me – the message in the thimble is about mending.

Like most everyone, my mother and I had some things that needed mending in our relationship. For that matter, my family – her sons and daughters – have some things to mend in ours as well. In truth, the *whole world* needs mending. Is the message that we all need to be about mending?

And isn't that what Jesus' life is all about -- mending the great tear in the universe – the tear that keeps us separated from God and from one another?

I felt certain that God was speaking to me through my mother's thimble – but I puzzled over how it mysteriously ended up in my front seat, more than a year since I saw it last.

In my mind, I retraced my steps on Thursday. Before going grocery shopping, I had attended Fresh Start, the monthly program for new rectors held at the Cathedral. Usually when I drive in Atlanta, I use that time to pray the

rosary – it keeps me from misbehaving behind the wheel when a hostile driver cuts me off.

I usually keep count of the prayers on my fingers, but for some reason, I know not why, I felt a desire to hold my mother’s rosary while praying. I remembered that the small purse was in my shoulder bag. I dug it out, found the rosary, and wrapped the string of beads around my hand.

When I arrived at the Cathedral, I put the rosary away, gathered my things, and went off to the meeting. When I came back to the car, I put my things on the passenger seat and drove to Gwinnett, where I stopped to pick up a few things at the grocery store. The forgotten thimble must have fallen out onto the car seat.

Random chance? Accidentally perfect timing? I’ve learned never to place limits on the ways in which God works in our lives.

In the passage of Luke’s Gospel that we read this morning, Jesus’ “mending mission” has already begun when

he returns to his hometown of Nazareth. Today's lesson picks up where we left off last week. Jesus is reading from the Scroll of the Prophet: Isaiah claiming his ministry of reconciliation and healing. Jesus says to his listeners: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

At first, the folks in Jesus' hometown respond enthusiastically – Isn't this Joseph's son? He is one of us – he will make us proud – even bring a little notoriety to this backwater, Nazareth. They claim him as their own – perhaps as Lilburn and Duluth have done with our hometown heroes, Jeff Francoeur and Brian McCann.

But, how quickly the sentiments of the Nazarenes change. Jesus shows no interest in gaining their favor. In fact, he does the opposite. He harkens back to their prophetic ancestors, Elijah and Elisha.

Each of these prophets acts outside the limits of Israel. Elijah heals the son of a widow from Sidon, a Gentile city; and Elisha cleanses Naaman, a Syrian. In both cases, the prophets

do something scandalous – they bring God’s healing power to outsiders, instead of to the unfaithful of Israel.

Jesus’ is telling the folks who raised him that his ministry of healing and mending goes far beyond their narrow city limits. It is not confined to God’s “chosen;” Jesus has come to mend the people of the entire world – regardless of their pedigree.

The message is too difficult for the people in Jesus’ hometown. How is it that God’s generosity moves independently of their sacred traditions – the ritual practices they’ve known all their lives? We can imagine the dissonance – the realization that God may not be exactly who they think God is. Suddenly, they fear that everything they live for is called into question.

And then their fear erupts as anger. Their favor turns to violence. Their violence exposes the tear in the fabric of their lives. Jesus withdraws from them. This is the first glimpse of the trouble that lies ahead.

We live in the ultimate reality that Christ mends the tear in our relationship with God – but we as His Church must do our part. But where do we begin to mend the places in our world torn by war, natural disaster, famine, and greed? We begin right here – right now.

As most of you know, our budget needs mending. We were blessed this week with generous pledges that have significantly narrowed the gap – but a gap remains. Our vestry and finance committee have exercised considerable discipline in creating a budget that reflects fiscal responsibility.

The mending work of Christ requires that we tend to our children and youth, the future of the Church; that we tend to our vulnerable neighbors in Norcross and beyond; that we tend to the ministry of our beloved Hispanic brothers and sisters, to our desperate friends in Haiti. Our calling from God is both compelling and urgent.

The mending of the world begins with you and me. God gives us a choice – but the only choice worth making is love. Love is the thread through which Christ mends the world.

This is a truth that we all know – but each of us needs to be reminded of it. This week, I was reminded by my mother's thimble.