

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

On Sunday I had noticed his shoes.

My husband and I attended the dedication of Robert Nathaniel's Tree at St. Stephen's church in Birmingham. The author, illustrator, designer, and their families, plus the Lightbearers publishing team, were in attendance. It was a very special day, for this was a very special book whose mission was to help children deal with death.

It was a tender hour of worship. From the moment we walked into this unknown sanctuary, we could feel the peace and calm. It was a Saint Francis-like church, where the wooden and glass structure seemed to be an extension of the outside environment. Squirrels and birds would have felt quite at home, just as we did.

The songs sung, the scriptures read, the sermon given, all seemed to seamlessly fit into a holy time of worship. The preacher gently told the story of Robert Nathaniel and his family. This baby lived on this earth for just two days. His Mama and Daddy and brother and sister loved him and mourned his death. They buried him in the garden of this church. We knew the Lord had embraced that baby just as He does all babies. You knew that this church had embraced his family in its pain, just as it should have.

Two years had passed. The family had moved to Tennessee and a new baby girl had been born. A book had been written. Life goes on. On that Sunday, however, Robert Nathaniel's life was celebrated.

I will never forget the preacher's shoes. I noticed them when we went up for Holy Communion. While kneeling, they came into view. They were old, worn lace-ups. They looked loved and comfortable. I'd seen such before, but never ones where the polish was totally off the toes and the toe tops. My husband also noticed them and said he bet they were 20 years old. The only thing I could figure was that the toe polish could only wear off from hours of kneeling in prayer. No wonder the man glowed and his church warmed you. He knew his Maker and spent time with Him and that was reflected in the sermon, in the service, in the scenery, and in the shoes.

He ended the service with the benediction of "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." That's Matthew 5:16. That was a perfect send-off, even more so than the minister realized, for it is the scripture we use on Lightbearers stationery and it is the Christian commission that we try to emulate.

Our party left after hugs and tears and smiles. The dedication was right and good.

The next day I heard, "Lucy, do you want to play pool?" Six-year-old David yelled down from the second floor. We were

in the midst of a four-hour reception at our home where over 200 people attended. Its purpose was to celebrate the publication of Robert Nathaniel's Tree, the book I just mentioned. There were friends selling, children passing refreshments, author and illustrator signing, but David yelled, "Lucy, do you want to play pool with me?"

I yelled back, "Not right now David, but thanks for asking."

I love this little boy. He is one of my favorite cheerleaders. He lives across the street. His mama designs our books. When things are really hopping at the company, I've been known to run across the street three or four times in a day. David usually runs with enthusiasm to wherever he's going, so he usually is the first to arrive at his front door. He yells, "Mom, it's Lucy." He meets me with a hug if we're near or a wave if we're far apart, like at church. He brings great joy to my life. His brother, Jason, who's 13, did the same thing at that age. His mother and I then weren't publishing books, but gluing and pasting for a church bazaar. Hugs and waves turn into more reserved smiles at 13, but I'm sure Jason knows that he's one of my special people, too.

That being so, why did I say, "Not right now, David?" Oh, and then I think of all the times I did and do say that - to my husband, my children, my friends, my acquaintances - "Not right now!"

Boy, what a slam dunk that is to a person. What is more important than quality time spent with another human being? It's like saying, "I don't have time for you. What I'm doing is more important than you are." Oh, I am so guilty, for if I'm focused on a project, I tend to turn off others.

This week my friend, Mary, gave me a wonderful quote over the phone. This friend often acts as my litmus paper as to whether an idea is good or bad, or a situation is right or wrong. She has great wisdom. She walks close to her Lord, goes daily to Mass, and says what she calls "scrawny prayers." From what I can discern, that's the best kind, for Mary walks with love and humor and humility.

This week's quote comes from her priest, who said, "God's not interested in our ability, but rather our availability." With that in mind, I think it would have been more appropriate to say, "Rack 'em up, David, here I come." At least that's what I think the St. Stephen's minister would have said; in fact, I'd bank on it.

For you see, the day after the reception I went back to Birmingham to distribute the new book and to catch a plane. At the party I had been given two letters, one from Cam, the illustrator, and another from Mary Barwick, my soul sister. I had intentionally chosen not to open either that day. It would have been too much to handle. I instead chose to go back to St. Stephen's, seek out the minister to tell him about how wonderful Sunday had been and also how well Monday's

reception had gone. It was also there in the sanctuary that I wanted to give thanks and to open and read the letters.

But first, I wanted to find the priest. I went downstairs to the administrative office and was met by a nice receptionist who said he'd take me to the minister's office. Half way there, he stopped and said, "Oh no, he's not there. I forgot, he's climbing up the belfry with some of the neighborhood children."

I was told to go up the steps, take a right, go into the first closet and there would be an aluminum ladder where they would be ascending and descending. Well, I wouldn't have missed that for the world. Sure enough, I found the shaky ladder, grabbed hold to steady it, and watched a Jacob's ladder type descent of barefooted, laughing, hot and sweaty children followed by one priest with old shoes with scuffed up toes. He smiled. I smiled.

I knew right then and there, if given the chance, he would have said to David, "Rack 'em up."

I believe this preacher is an available man, like the Man he follows, our Lord Jesus.

Lord, may I so become, and Precious Pilgrim, that's my prayer for you today.

*With love, I am your sister in Christ,
Lucy*