

“Treasures Hidden in the Walls”

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¹Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem...
²He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

³In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the Lord, saying, ⁴“Go up to the high priest Hilkiah, and have him count the entire sum of the money that has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people; ⁵let it be given into the hand of the workers who have the oversight of the house of the Lord; let them give it to the workers who are at the house of the Lord, repairing the house, ⁶that is, to the carpenters, to the builders, to the masons; and let them use it to buy timber and quarried stone to repair the house. ⁷But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly.”

⁸The high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.” When Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it. ⁹Then Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, “Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workers who have oversight of the house of the Lord.” ¹⁰Shaphan the secretary informed the king, “The priest Hilkiah has given me a book.” Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

¹¹When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. ¹²Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king’s servant Asaiah, saying, ¹³“Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”
(2 Kings 22:1-13)

Right after we were married, Stephanie and I watched a lot of Home and Garden Television, and one of my favorite shows was called "If Walls Could Talk." Each episode featured people who, in the midst of renovations, came across unexpected finds in the rubble. One lucky homeowner discovered thousands of dollars that had been stashed in her bathroom wall during the Depression. Others found stock certificates, portraits, jewelry, old architectural drawings, or vintage toys from days gone by. Some finds were valuable, but most of them were just curious, even mysterious... clues to a backstories and histories that would never be fully known. But in every episode, someone found a treasure hidden in their walls.

I doubt the show is still running, but if it was, this story from Second Kings would have made a great episode. As a young, energetic, and hopeful king of Israel, Josiah has initiated a massive renovation of the temple in Jerusalem. Over the years, the center and symbol of the nation’s worship had fallen into disrepair – mostly from lack of use, but also because some of the previous kings had begun to dabble in idolatry. Some of them had installed idols and statues in the house of the Lord that had no business being there. So Josiah commissions a team of workers, led by the high priest Hilkiah, to renovate and restore the temple to its former glory, and its former purity. In addition to royal funds, a widespread



collection is solicited from the people of Israel, who bring their offerings up to the outer courtyard of the temple and give them to officers at the gate, “the keepers of the threshold.” This money was used to pay and support the team of workers that was already at work.

As most renovations do, the team had started with “demo” – the demolition phase when the sledgehammers swing and unwanted cabinets, fixtures, and walls come down. A few weeks in, when the demo phase is complete, Josiah sends his secretary Shaphan up to the temple to consult with the high priest Hilkiah and get both an accounting of how the money is holding up and a report on how the work is going. When Hilkiah gives the secretary his report, he adds an interesting detail. In the midst of the demolition, in the dusty rubble of that gritty work, they had found a book. And as a priest, Hilkiah knew that it was a significant book – a priestly, spiritual book that contained sacred elements of the covenant law. When he gave the book to Shaphan, the secretary read it and agreed. This was an important find, and the king needed to know about this treasure they had found hidden in the walls.

Over the summer, we had our own little renovation at the church. Renovation is not really the right word, because we didn’t use any sledgehammers or break down any walls. But we did clean out a bunch of old stuff that had accumulated through the years. Led by Maria and Betty from our church staff, a team went up into the attic and rummaged through closets, cabinets, and lots of other nooks and crannies in the church. A lot of what they found went to the trash, but as you might imagine, we found some real treasures hidden around the grounds. I brought a few of them this morning for show and tell:

First is a team **photo of the powerhouse LAC basketball team** of 1950-1951, led by legendary coach Don Dickerman, who is looking a lot like a young Dean Smith in his stylish tie and blazer. Leading these roundball wizards of Westchester were MVP “Big Bill” Doscher, the “Rush Chairman” Vin Stratton, and of course point guard Jim Savage, who needed no nickname. Their names are just printed here, but we can imagine the details.

Second, and more seriously, we have a **pin from the Emily Lindsley Legacy Society**, which recognizes members of our congregation who have made a commitment to the future of LAC by designating a testamentary gift to the church in their will or estate plan. The center of these elegant pin bears the pattern of the rose window above us. Some of you may already have one of these. I would love to award this in the future to someone who does not yet have one!

Next is the **2006 LAC Family Cookbook**. I bet many of you have one of these on your kitchen shelves. Ida Hughes’ “Angel Pie,” which includes ground up peanut brittle, does sound angelic, and I am definitely intrigued by Sonya DiSalvo’s recipe for “Chocolate ‘Whacky’ Cake.”

But my favorite part of the cookbook is the dedication, which reads as follows:

“This cookbook is dedicated to The Second Thursday Tea Group, who first ‘took tea’ together in October, 2005. They represent a longstanding tradition of church fellowship, service to each other, and to the communities in which we live.”

And it did not surprise me at all to read that 100% of the proceeds from the sale of this cookbook went to support local and worldwide mission efforts of Larchmont Avenue Church.

Not far away our team of intrepid explorers found this **mug, an artifact of the “Second Thursday Tea” events** of years past.

This is just a small sampling of the things that were found hidden in our walls, and in some ways they are very ordinary, everyday things... that is, until we start to think about the stories behind each of these little treasures. These small pieces of our history are all precious reminders of what this place has meant to those who came before us. They recall the times of fellowship, prayer, play, and service that have built a legacy that now falls to us to preserve and protect and grow.

When King Josiah's secretary returned to the king to report back on the progress of work at the temple, we are not told what we said about church finances, or whether the workers were on schedule. But we do know that he said to the king, "*The priest Hilkiah has given me a book.*" After explaining how this lost treasure had been discovered, the secretary began to read some of the sacred words to the king. And when Josiah heard those words, he fell to the floor and tore his garments. He broke down with grief because he knew that these words were from God... he knew that they had been central to his people in the past... and he knew that all of that had been lost... that somehow this treasury of God's Word had somehow been mislaid... neglected... even forgotten as God's people went off in search of other things, even other gods... just as we sometimes do with the Bibles that may have once been on our bedside table, but are not there anymore. Maybe it sits on a shelf in another room, or maybe a box in the basement, or maybe, truth be told, we do not know where it might be.¹

One thing we do know is that this one discovery transformed King Josiah's understanding of the work that lay before him. Once the book was discovered, once he heard the words, he was no longer just cleaning up an old building. He was now the leader of a revival of faith and obedience for all of his people. His chief priest and secretary were moved in the same way. Each person who held that treasure that had been hidden in the wall was reminded, to their core, of who they were and what they were meant to be.

On this first day of a new program year, as we welcome one another back from all kinds of wonderful summer activities, I hope all of us will hear and remember just how vital and lifegiving this congregation has been to those who came before us. We sometimes forget how central the church is and should be in our lives. We get busy with other things. Life takes us down other paths. But, fortunately for us, every now and then, we stumble upon a little something that reminds us of just how important the life of faith is and always has been to us.

The very first recipe in that LAC Cookbook from 2006 stands apart from all the others. It is a recipe in name only, although it does offer instructions on how to create something new. The first recipe in the book is a poem, one aptly named "A Recipe For a Day":

¹ Matthew Henry's Commentary, 2 Kings 22:1-10, https://biblehub.com/m/2_kings/22-8.htm

*Take a little dash of water cold, and a little leaven of prayer,
And a little bit of morning gold, dissolved in the morning air.*

*Add to your meal some merriment, and a thought for kith and kin;
And then, as your prime ingredient, a plenty of work throw in.*

*But spice it all with the essence of love, and a little whiff of play;
Then a wise old Book and a glance above, complete the well-spent day.²*

Thinking back to the name of that HGTV show I used to enjoy, I don't really think the question is "If Walls Could Talk," because walls can talk, and they do talk. In this place, God still speaks to us through treasures hidden in these walls, and they all tell a story of faithful people and how they have worked to give life and meaning to that faith.

In the year to come, let's commit ourselves to listening closely to what these walls and their treasures have to say, and let us add our own stories to the sacred treasury of Larchmont Avenue Church. **Amen.**

² The 2005 cookbook says that "A Recipe For a Day" was "taken from the 1966 LAC recipe collection *Serve With Grace*," but the author is said to be unknown. Some have attributed the verse to the 19th century American poet Amos R. Wells.