

“Everyday” activities affect us deeply

by Vickie Shurelds

Romans 12:15, Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (NRSV)

I’m sure this is a “cultural thing,” but when I was a little girl, hours were spent every other week at our kitchen table or in front of the stove getting my hair “done.” The hair of African Americans could be a challenge without the aid of all the simple relaxers that are on the market today. First, taking down the braids and combing-through was an adventure which sometimes was accompanied by painful guttural sounds that could simply not be prevented; however, any sounds that made it through would be greeted with even more pulling, additional pain, and the threat of an added smack with the brush. The hair washing after this combing was also a torturous affair. After the washing, came the comb-through (just as painful) and re-braiding until the hair was dry. This was followed by the hot comb experience. A heated metal comb was dragged through the hair until the resultant smoothing guaranteed little trouble until the next washing. The day’s events went a little faster if one of Mom’s friends dropped by to talk and laugh with her, making the entire event much easier to endure.

I enjoyed these times, because after a while, my presence was forgotten and the women would begin to speak in earnest about their views, feelings, and fears about world affairs. I learned a lot during those times about the strength of African American women and the need to evaluate situations and make decisions on which battles should be fought, and those that were better left for another day. I would hear stories of the treatment of my mother and her friends at work, the frustration they felt after being overlooked for promotion or humiliating tasks they were asked to do in employers’ efforts to get them to quit their jobs. The stories were followed by statements like, “I don’t care what they do, God takes care of me,” or, “They can’t make me feel bad, because I know I’m a child of God.” The women would comfort each other, pray together, and then, after a while, the laughter would begin again.

Many women frequent beauty parlors today, and spend much less time in the kitchen “doing hair,” yet, I wonder if we’re not limiting our children by denying them the chance to listen in on those

connecting moments between friends. Gone are the back door neighbors, as well as those who stood at their backyard fences and talked for hours on end.

Another of my favorite memories is watching my mother hang out clothes in the backyard and engage the other women in the neighborhood as they hung out their clothes. Our backyard touched the yards of four others. We were the first black family to move into our addition, so the experience of listening to my mother respond to non-black women—while maintaining her dignity—as she expanded their knowledge of culturally specific ideas and corrected their worldview was significant, as was her being an example that was so far above what they could even possibly imagine.

These instances became a source of discussion in the kitchen, a sorting-through of the world at that very time. These opportunities, although rarely experienced today, were responsible for bringing together the strength of friendships within a community. We see an example of this in Job 2:11 as Job's friends come to "console and comfort him" when they hear of his troubles. (NRSV)

Additionally, for centuries, we have been aware that the bonds we develop in friendships can also strengthen the bond we have with Christ. We can take the time at our kitchen tables, in coffee shops, or wherever we may meet with our friends, to draw strength from one another, to grow strong in our faith and our abilities to face the future.

PONDER

Am I taking the strength of my faith and making it accessible to my friends by offering them comfort for the day-to-day strife they experience?

Prayer: Make of my heart, Oh Lord, an open place for friends and neighbors to gather and feel comfort, support, and encouragement. Give me guidance to the places where I, too may find compassion in my hour of need. Allow me to always follow the light of your love that I may help guide others to your strength. 🙏