

Genesis 22:1-14; Psalm 13; Romans 6:12-23, Matthew 10: 40-42

**Prepared by the Rev. Dr. Seamus P. Doyle**

*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me... whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-honestly, I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.*

In her program on NPR a few years ago, Diane Rehm's reported that she was fascinated when a Black man, partially intoxicated, came into her church the previous Sunday morning. She's an Episcopalian who attends an obviously all white church. What excited her was the fact that the couple in front of her reached out and took the man's arm and invited him to sit with them.

In the bulletin today is the story of a woman who took a man off the streets and not only provided him with a hot meal but also with a job, clothes and a place to live. She was paying him back for his generosity to her when she was a young college grad with no money and no food. When he thanked her she replied "Don't thank me. Thank God who directed me to you this morning."

Back in the early 70's when the Roman Catholic Church was beginning to have the equivalent of a Vestry, a young priest was talking to his Parish Council about the poverty in their area. One man asked him where these poor people lived. He had attended this particular church all his life, lived not too far from it and had never seen any poor people. After the meeting the priest took the parishioner for a drive through a part of the parish he never knew existed. The man was obviously struck by what he saw. The next day the priest received a call from the man who told the priest

he had his employees empty one of his large storage sheds and that the priest was to fill it with whatever was needed for the poor. When the priest asked who would pay for this the man laughed and replied, "Father, just send me the bill for everything. Just do not tell anyone, and I mean no one, who is behind this."

In the mid 60's a man by the name of Frank lived on the streets of a Louisiana small city. He was a member of a prominent family but alcohol and drugs had taken hold of him and he walked out of his home and away from a business he had built up over the years. One night two men came up to him, picked him up and took him to an AA meeting. Three months later Frank was back working in the store he once owned. Five years later he was the only family member sober when his mother died and he planned her funeral. At the time of her death he had bought back his own store and opened another one. Frank died twenty years later and never touched alcohol or drugs again.

In New York a Jewish shop owner discovered that one of his most trusted employees was stealing from him. He had the young man arrested, charged and jailed. At the hearing he told the Judge the young man was one of his best employees and requested that the young man be placed on probation and ordered to work for him for the next year. The judge thought it a strange request but complied. The shop owner explained that the young man would never steal again because he now knew the consequences of his action and he also needed to learn that he could be trusted again if he was to build his self esteem.

Frank Duffy was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1889 At the age of twenty four joined the St. Vincent De Paul society in which he developed

a great sensitivity for the poor and underprivileged. While Ireland was in the midst of a Civil War in 1921 he formed a movement known as the Legion of Mary. One aspect of the work of the Legion was quietly helping young girls find gainful employment other than working the streets at night.

During Crowdad days about four years ago here in Harrison, a young man, drunk and on drugs, was taken aside, given a couple of sandwiches and told, "You may never remember this, but just know I love you and God loves you." Somewhat stunned, the young man muttered a "thank you" and went on his way. A few weeks ago this young man went into the office of the man who gave him the sandwiches, thanked him for his past kindness and then told him that he was now two years clean and sober.

Tom was a young social worker in Dublin. He worked with kids no one else wanted to work with. One of those kids was a tough gang leader who was loved by some and feared by many others. Tom said it took five years of patient work but finally this young man turned from being a thief and gang leader to one of the best youth leaders in the community.

In 1965 Millard and Linda Fuller left a successful business and their affluent lifestyle in Montgomery, Alabama to live in the Koinonia Christian Farming community. In 68 Koinonia laid out 42 half-acre house sites with four acres for a community park and recreational area. The homes were sold to families in need at no profit and no interest and the model for Habitat was born. Since 1976 Habitat for Humanity International has built and rehabilitated more than 250,000 houses with families in need.

St. Paul says *the wages of sin is death*. All too often this has been discussed and preached in terms of Eternal damnation. If we understand sin as being removed from God then addiction, pride, racism, materialism are

the sins that have kept many people from being fully functioning spiritual people. We never know when someone is going to come into our lives and confront us with love and compassion and convict us of being among the walking dead.

We have a tendency to believe that because we attend church on a regular basis, or because we say we believe in God we are spiritual or religious people. The reality is that many who attend church on a regular basis are among those who are spiritually dead. They are going through the motions of compassion, generosity, caring, but it may be for the wrong reasons, for selfish reasons, for recognition, guilt, etc. To be fully alive, fully human, fully spiritual, we do what we are called to do for one reason and one reason only, because we are responding to our baptismal covenant: “to seek and serve Christ in all persons loving our neighbor as ourselves; to go out of our way to work for justice and peace among all peoples, and respect the dignity of every human being.”

To be alive spiritually is to be in touch with the pain and suffering of those around us. To be spiritually alive is to acknowledge our own brokenness, none of us are perfect, and in honestly dealing with our own brokenness we come to grips with our dependency on the grace of God to guide us. As St Paul points out, our gifts are given to us for the common good and we can't pray without the Spirit prompting us.

*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.* This concept is more than just shaking hands with a stranger and saying, “Welcome.” It is an active intentional action of going out of our way to show hospitality, to be genuine in our welcome of those who are strangers, those whom we do not know, those whom we may judge to be of a lower social order than we are. As the Native

American proverb says, “You don’t know someone till you have walked a mile in their moccasins.” We welcome people in the name of God and seek and serve Christ within them.

What we are being challenged in today’s Gospel reading is to be mindful of those God puts in our path. We are being challenged to evaluate why we do what we do and see that we do it for the right reason. We are being challenged to not only open our pocket books but to take off our coats, roll up our sleeves and become actively involved with those in need as our spiritual brothers and sisters. We are being challenged see that small acts of kindness are as important as the larger works being done.

We cannot all leave our businesses and homes but all of us can do something simple that will change the life of not only the person we help but perhaps begin a chain reaction of helping many others. As the saying goes “feed a person a fish and you give him a meal. Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Jesus taught us how to become fishers of people by his words and actions. In renewing our Baptismal covenant we also recommit to becoming fishers of people.

*Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these the least of my brothers and sisters in the name of a disciple – honestly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.*