

"Good Will Hunting"

24 July 2005

Bible passage: **Matthew 25:36, 39** (*The Message*)

I was hungry, and you fed me.

I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink.

I was homeless, and you gave me a room.

I was shivering, and you gave me clothes.

I was sick, and you stopped to visit.

I was in prison, and you came to me....

"I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me."

Not this last spring, but the year before, a group of us from The Garden walked or ran the Race for the Cure, which was established to raise funds for cancer research to stomp out breast cancer. It was a beautiful day, and my husband and daughter and I walked together the three mile course, as did almost fifty others from here. Some of you were there as well, because we saw a number from The Garden who participated with their groups from work or as a part of another team.

I don't know if any of the rest of you experienced this, or not, but when the walk was over, I was filled with this feeling of exhilaration! It was a wonderful experience to see the throngs of people who were there committed to this cause, and it was truly moving to watch those who had survived this disease wear their pink shirts and boas and hats. It was truly an inspiring event.

Now, a year later, I find myself reflecting on why we did that, both from the perspective of The Garden, and from my own personal perspective. Originally, as I recall, it was an idea that the Leadership Team had to create a way for Gardeners to connect with one another, and it did a little of that, although the major connection was in the picture-taking before the race began. Once we began walking, it was easy to get separated from one another, and there was no pre-arranged gathering spot to connect after the event was over. Then, when it came time to think about organizing this year's participation, no one came forward to head it up, so The Garden didn't field a team of participants in 2005.

When I reflect on my own participation, I have to admit that there were mixed motives. For one thing, I'm one of the leaders of The Garden, and felt I needed to model what I say I believe—that we're here to help one another. And I believe it is important that we find informal ways to connect with one another, and this seemed like a good one.

However, there were some other things going on with me, too. Part of it was the motivation to keep walking and make sure I was in good enough shape to make the distance, and I wanted the same thing for the rest of my family. I have to be honest to say that I didn't ask anyone to pledge any money to contribute to the cause, because I feel a bit uncomfortable doing that, and I really didn't make any extra contribution either. All I did was walk, and experience the thrill of being a part of that event, along with 40,000 others!

To be honest, I wasn't totally aware of how good it would make me feel to participate, but I have to tell you that I got a whole lot more out of it than I expected to, and many times more than I gave. What I'm saying, I guess, is that, when it's all said

and done, I was really in it for me, and not for anyone or anything else. And I don't feel very good about having to admit that.

Thinking about that experience reminded me of something Carver McGriff, long-time senior pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church, said one time in a sermon. He talked about doing something nice for someone, and why we do that. The example he used was that a friend was sick, and we decided to try to help our friend feel better by taking over some chicken soup. Carver's question was: What was our motive exactly? Did we want our friend to feel better because of our soup, or did we want our friend to think well of us? Was that a selfish motivation, or was it something we did from the heart, and reaped a side benefit? I'm not sure that we can answer that for anyone except ourselves.

Our Bible passage this morning seems to be addressing this situation. Jesus is telling his friends a story, and it's from the gospel of Matthew. The essence of that theme is that what we do now matters; it matters when all is said and done. And what really seems to matter the most is that we do our part to help those in need.

This is the way our version reads:

I was hungry, and you fed me.

I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink.

I was homeless, and you gave me a room.

I was shivering, and you gave me clothes.

I was sick, and you stopped to visit.

I was in prison, and you came to me.

...

"I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me."

In my opinion, this passage is really urging us to look into the face of every human being, and to see the face of God. It affirms something we say a lot here at The Garden—that every one of us is a child of God, created by God, loved by God, and that every one of us has that spark of God-like-ness within us. It reminds me of the phrase whose origin I do not know, but whose sentiment I like a lot. It's this: "The God in me greets the God in you...The Spirit in me meets the same Spirit in you." To me, that speaks of equality, and it honors the humanity and sacred worth of each and every person.

Furthermore, the Bible passage assures each of us that we have the capacity to help one another. Sometimes I fear we get intimidated and think we have to be about some grandiose thing in order to help others, and that's simply not what this passage is telling us. Feeding someone who is hungry, or giving a drink of water to someone who's thirsty isn't exactly a difficult thing for any of us to do. Giving a blanket to someone who's freezing isn't asking a great deal of us, nor is stopping by to visit someone who's ill. The simplest act—a smile to a stranger on the street, a warm handshake to someone we've just met—even the smallest act like that is honoring the God within each person.

There's another part to all of this, and that's the reality that our actions will probably always have mixed motives, but that shouldn't keep us from acting out good will toward to others. I suppose everything we do for another has a way of being self-gratifying, and something we do may wind up making the headlines, or the news. As long as that's not the reason we do a kindness for another, I guess that's OK. Nor should that keep us from doing something kind for another person.

I don't know about you, but I'd really like to live my life differently. Like all of you, I'm busy, and all too often I use that as an excuse not to look around me and respond to the needs that are everywhere to be seen. Some of you are so very good at offering a hand to others, extending kindness to your friends as well as to total strangers, and many of you provide a sterling

example for the rest of us to follow.

There are so many ways we can help. For instance, at numerous times throughout the year, there are food drives that help supply canned goods and other non-perishables to pantries and to those who feed the homeless and hungry. We can participate.

On your tables this morning is a blue sheet that talks about an opportunity we have to participate in the "Backpack Attack." We can bring backpacks and school supplies to fill those backpacks here to The Garden over the next couple of weeks, and provide necessities for school for children who might not otherwise be able to afford them. We'll be collecting these things over the next two Sundays.

There are many, many needs around us, and each one of us can help. As Samuel Johnson once said, "To cultivate kindness is a valuable part of the business of life." I wonder if cultivating kindness isn't the *only* business of life.

Frankly, that's exactly what we try to do each month with our 10% Charitable Contribution. Just in case you don't know, each and every month, The Garden selects a different organization from around the metropolitan area, and designates that 10% of our Sunday offerings will go to that organization. The recipient for the month of June was Trusted Partners, a mentoring organization. Let's take a look at the screens and learn more about them.

VIDEO: Trusted Partners

I'd like to introduce to you Jeri Warner, who's the director of Trusted Partners. We are very pleased to present to you a check in the amount of \$2, 168.

Closing:

This morning, we've talked about reaching out and helping someone in need. It seems to me that that is the ultimate measure of a life, so now it's up to us to go do it..

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that each of us will help someone today and every day. Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.