

Week 6 – Mar 21-25

As you finish up this Lenten season, and this devotional series, how has God spoken to you? What is He calling you to do? The series tried to touch on many aspects of compassion ministry. Our prayer team is praying for God's enlightenment to touch you fully.



Homeless, Not Abandoned

LuAnn Prater

Isaiah 61:1

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.” (NIV)

I got a text saying my sister was on the news in our home state. I raced to my computer to pull up the local station. As director of a home that houses young, troubled women, she was pleading that the homeless be counted in the 2010 Census.

It seemed like not too many years ago my sister and I could have ended up in that home. Our lives could have taken a “Mary turn.” I met Mary at a fundraising banquet for the Rescue Mission. She sat next to me and we immediately connected. Two years earlier she had stepped into the wrong car. A man took what he wanted from her, then left her for dead on the side of the road.

She’d already known a hard life. As a child she’d rebelled against her parents and run away. For 21 years she had lived on the streets. But then she went with a fellow homeless girl to the Rescue Mission. When they entered, she witnessed something that touched her deeply. The Mission folks embraced her friend and told her how much they had missed her and been praying for her safety. In 21 years no one had ever done that for Mary.

There was something different in this place. Mary physically healed there while Jesus ministered to her soul through the love of His servants. She discovered what it meant to be a child of the King and gave her heart to Him. She learned how to make wise choices, obey Mission rules, and become faithful to herself and to Jesus.

Mary now has two jobs, lives in her own apartment and serves at her church nearly every time the doors are open. She glows with God’s brilliant grace and looks like she just stepped out of a fashion magazine. Her smile lights up the room.

She said her momma never stopped praying for her. She now praises God for the years of heartache and hardships because they put her in touch with the Savior.

My parents, too, were on their knees for my sister and me many times. Maybe that person you see on the street has parents with calluses on their knees.

Watching my once wayward sister stand up for the homeless on TV that day made my heart smile. Our parents would be smiling too, for she displays the Lord’s splendor in the Rescue Mission.

Are you His witness? Go display His splendor today because I see His brilliant grace shining on you!

Prayer: Dear Lord, forgive me for walking right by the hurting without even noticing. Open my eyes to see the world through Your eyes. May I point a broken heart to the Great Healer. Amen.

Loving the Unlovely

Diane Markinshare

Proverbs 11:25

“A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

I just read ***Under the Overpass*** by Mike Yankoski, a true story of two college guys who wanted to experience life as homeless people. They spent months on the streets of cities like Denver, Washington D.C., Portland, San Francisco, San Diego and my hometown, *Phoenix*.

What they learned is that “street people” are at best invisible and at worst reviled. They attended church every Sunday and were not very warmly received in most because of how they looked and smelled. They were even thrown off the property of one church lawn in our own city.

Of Phoenix the author says, “We experienced big programs, big churches, and big talk, without much love in action, at least for two unappealing transients like us.”

I don’t think any of us sees ourselves as unloving or unwelcoming but I’m not sure how excited any of us would be if two dirty, foul-smelling men wanted to occupy the seat next to ours in church or at Sunday brunch. I’ll admit I’ve been the first one to beat a retreat on occasion.

We may judge them as being lazy or drug addicts and almost always try to escape before they ask us for something. Yankoski points out that the people he met on his “experiment” didn’t *suddenly* become homeless panhandlers. It happened slowly over time and was typically precipitated by events that damaged their lives horrifically.

The point I’m heading toward is that we need to remember the sacrifices Christ made and the attitudes he demonstrated. I’m not just talking about the Big One (His own terrible, painful death), but the time Jesus spent with the smelly, unappealing people He encountered every day. He talked with them, ate with them, touched them and genuinely cared for them and expects as much from us.

“I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” Matthew 25:45

Do we really want the reputation of *Big* programs but *Little* compassion? Whether it is someone who is malodorous or just has a stinky disposition, we need to walk toward them, take a moment to listen, encourage them and see how we can help meet an immediate need. A granola bar, a smile, a kind word or a listening ear may feel like the love of God to someone who isn’t used to being bestowed those gifts.

Prayer: Jesus, show people I meet that I am a Christian by my love. Make some changes in me so my alignment with You is more apparent. Amen

ABUNDANCE

BY DAN RUTH

Ezekiel 3:3

He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

Food is one of the most prominent metaphors throughout the Bible. Harvest, manna, honey, wine and wedding banquets: these things paint pictures throughout scripture of God's blessings. They are images that sustain the life of God's people and bring God's people together into abundant celebration of that life.

"You are what you eat" and eating is such an important piece of life that there's almost no more powerful metaphor in scripture. Ezekiel isn't just given a scroll to read, he is told to eat that word, to chew it, taste it and ingest it, so that God's word literally becomes part of him. Ezekiel does not become a prophet who merely speaks God's word; Ezekiel is sustained by God's word, and it is sweet as honey.

In other parts of Scripture, God's word isn't food, it's the other way around: food is God's Word. We repeat Jesus' words in worship and we consume that Word:

"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

People don't always have the food they need to sustain themselves or their families. Many people can't grow enough food on their own land; others don't even have the land they'd need to grow something; and still other people are surrounded by enough food, but for political or economic reasons can't access it. By helping people around the world access sustaining food, we both respond to and participate in God's word. God's promise to us is everlasting, sustaining life. May that promise fill our bodies, energizing and nourishing us to give thanks and to work to ensure that all people, in all places, are well fed.

PRAYER God of abundance, you give of yourself in the bread and wine that feeds us. Send us out in the world to share abundantly with those who have only known scarcity. In the name of Jesus, AMEN.

Feeling Violated

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

I was in Milwaukee this past week for our District’s annual conference. Just prior to the end of the enriching, inspiring event, something happened...vandalism to several cars in the parking lot. Someone I spoke to commented that they felt violated (theirs was one of the cars with damage.) Others took it in stride praying their Bibles would impact the thieves, while still others are claiming they won’t go back.

I’ve spent some time thinking about that...our fear of those we are supposed to be ministering to. And the concept that we should always feel safe and secure and that bad things like this don’t happen to people is totally unfounded. But then we’re a denomination of rural churches who feel safe in their hometowns. Is it just our denomination though? Don’t most churches build in the outskirts?

When we live in the “civilized world,” we don’t always accept the fact that people live in the midst of drugs and crime every day. We don’t want to imagine the fact that people all over the world (including our country) live in fear of being robbed or violated in some other way. Yet the bulk of our population lives in cities where this is as common as our rural Master Gardeners Clubs.

As Christians, we are called to minister to the less fortunate...yet we remain in the comfort of our safe homes and neighborhoods. We send others, but justify not traveling to a church that might present danger to our material possessions. Isn’t the loss of our property worth a lost soul won for Jesus?

I know. I lived in Milwaukee...in fact only a few blocks from where the incident occurred. And trust me, this isn’t the worst part of town. I know what it’s like to hear gunshots two doors down at two in the morning. I know the fear of threats to kidnap your child because ‘red-heads bring the best price,’ long before “human trafficking” was a phrase. To those who are upset their cars were broken into, think about someone walking into your home while you are asleep and robbing you...twice in one week!

In hindsight, I see many times that the hand of God protected me and those entrusted to our care, like the Christian college students from out of town staying with us, who wandered off and got lost in the inner city. But like God was with Gideon when the numbers were against them, like he was with a young man sold into slavery by his brothers, like he was with a frightened ill-equipped man sent to make demands on Pharaoh, as He stood with three faithful men in a fiery furnace...He’s with us today. So if you walk in fear and feel violated when little things happen, pray for those around the world facing real violations, people who are truly helpless to protect themselves, people who don’t even dream of owning the many things we possess. Maybe you want to ask God to show you how to help them. But be careful...God may call you to personally “go” instead of just writing a check this time.

Prayer: Lord, remove my own fears that might be keeping me from doing your work. And we pray for those around the world who are in real danger of being violated. Protect them and give them the strength to face one more day. Amen

PROMISE

BY DAN RUTH

Hebrews 10:22

“Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

In biblical times, water was a mixed blessing, at best. Necessary for life, and often seen as a blessing, it was also associated with chaos and death.

The waters of the flood were both promise and destruction; the Red Sea was a symbol of both liberation and death.

In many of the communities of the world, water can also be a mixed blessing.

The water is swimming with life, but it is far from life-giving. Parasites, bacteria and other microorganisms lurk in the waters, causing a multitude of illnesses.

Children, whose bodies lack the resistance of their elders, are especially vulnerable.

For them, drinking this living water can be the beginning of a downward spiral that includes malnutrition, school absence and sometimes even death.

Yet, as people of faith, we know the powerful promise that God brings to water. And we know that water is essential to life. In the fourth chapter of John, Jesus met a woman at a well and asked her for a drink of water.

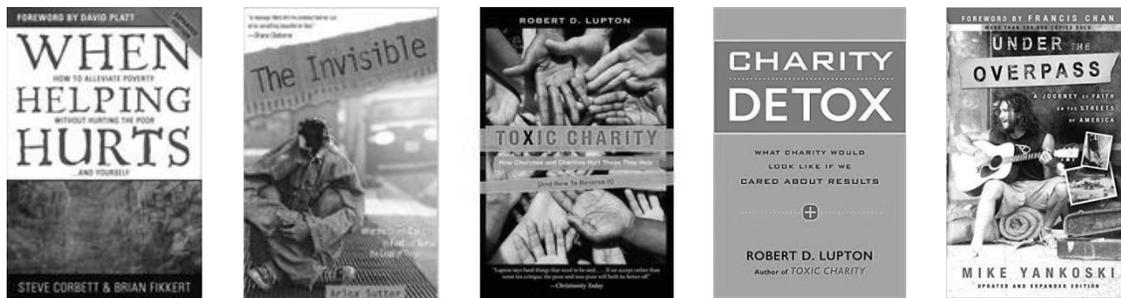
Jesus spoke to her heart, telling her that he could give her “living water, bubbling up to eternal life.” This living water that Jesus promised is alive not with microorganisms, but with God’s lasting promise.

In the waters of baptism, we are drowned in water and the word and reborn children of God. Here water brings death, but through that death, God grants us eternal life.

PRAYER: God of promise, you promised to be with your people through the waters of the Red Sea and with us in the waters of baptism. May your promise be known through the life-giving waters provided to communities where water has been dry, In Jesus' name, Amen.

Further Reading:

The world of missions has changed over the years as the world itself has changed. If you would like a list of books to broaden your vision, you may want to consider the following:



- When Helping Hurts – *How to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor or yourself* by Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert (thoughts on compassion ministry abroad and at home)
- The Invisible by Arloa Sutteer (discover who and where the least of these are)
- Toxic Charity – by Robert Lupton (how today’s charity actually hurts the ones it is intended to help)
- Charity Detox – by Robert Lupton (the sequel to Toxic Charity on how to fix the problem)
- Under the Overpass – *A Journey of Faith on the Streets of America* by Mike Yankoski (story of 2 college boys who chose to live homeless for 5 months)