

**New S t. James Presbyterian Church  
Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost  
Sunday, October 24, 2021**

**Guest Preacher: Margaret McGugan**

**“The Homeless Jesus”**

‘I was hungry....I was thirsty.....I was a stranger....’

The reading of Matthew this morning is a vision of the last judgment putting before us six kinds of people: the hungry, the thirsty, aliens, the naked, the sick, and prisoners.

The distress they suffer involves most of them being homeless. The scene is an enthronement of the Son of Man as he becomes King and Judge.

Jesus is clear about the timing of the last judgment: the gospel will first be proclaimed to all the nations, and no one knows when the end will come. Though we do not know the time, we do know what Jesus expects us to do: feed people who are hungry, quench their thirst, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the aged and sick, and visit those in prison.

There are many references in the gospels to Jesus’ relationship with the poor. The blind man; the leper; the hemorrhaging woman-- just to name a few.

As Jesus remarked to Judas Iscariot, ‘you always have the poor with you’ (John 12:8) is in response to Judas’ sarcastic remark about Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet with expensive nard.

And if we look back into the book of Deuteronomy (15:7-8), we are told. “If there is among you anyone in need...do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand.”

Looking around at the cities, and refugee camps of our world, we might make this remark more specific and say, ‘we always have the homeless with us.’

Jesus had some powerful things to say about the situation of the homeless and did many things for them. Jesus related to the homeless in his time and He relates to the homeless today.

We are aware that Jesus did not start life in a cozy cradle in a home nor in a hospital. He was born in a stable, and his crib was an eating trough for animals. That is how his life began, as a homeless baby, born to parents who were sleeping rough. He had hardly come into the world when Mary and Joseph took him across the border to escape the murderous intentions of King Herod the Great. Jesus and his family became homeless asylum-seekers in Egypt where they lived for two years.

During the years he was growing up in Nazareth, Jesus did enjoy a home to live in. But once he was baptized by John and began his public ministry, he became again a homeless person not out of necessity but by choice.

Speaking about himself as ‘the Son of Man’, he said: Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’ (Matt.8:20; Luke 9:58).

Jesus had no home he could call his own, no fixed address nor a place of safety and security. Even the Temple priests became sceptic of who Jesus said he was.

He lived his life out in the open, sometimes alone, and sometimes sleeping out in the chill of night or wrapped in a wet shawl.

The Gospel writers tell us Jesus stayed in a home when he journeyed to Bethany to visit Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. There he received hospitality and kindness as master, teacher, and a devout friend.

Even at the end of his life, Jesus did not die at home or in a hospital. He was not supported by the kind of care that dying people can expect.

He died by crucifixion. A barbarous Roman punishment for criminals and thieves.

Who is more homeless than a person nailed up on a cross? Jesus was stripped of his dignity to die in agony, with no home, no possessions, no bank account and hardly a friend within sight. In his own way, Jesus was born, lived, and died as a homeless person-- the brother and friend of all homeless people and of all refugees and asylum seekers.

Timothy P. Schmalz, a Canadian artist, who lived in Toronto and saw homelessness, depicted Christ as the most marginalized in our society. Sometimes art whether painted or sculpted, is designed to shock us just as the gospel parables can be shocking. Mr. Schmalz saw Christ in the least of our brothers and sisters as he shaped the hot, molten bronze into a body wrapped in a blanket sleeping on a park bench. Out of Mr. Schmalz's ability, came a life-like figure depicting a person whose life is as sacred as ours. On first glance of the figure, many people do not see the nail marks. They see a homeless person trying to keep warm, wrapped in a blanket in a public space. They see human vulnerability. Some onlookers see natural losers taking over their parks. Some cathedrals refused to have the Homeless Jesus sculpture dress their premises just because it draws the homeless to it. But Mr. Schmalz saw a chance to bring homelessness to the forefront. He learned that a homeless person, a marginalized person feels disconnected to the ideas of Jesus being represented as Mr. Perfect or that 'everything is fine' in our world. He molded and sculpted the Homeless Jesus so they would have something to relate to... as he says, 'to let them in'.

The sculptures of the Homeless Jesus have seen people sit at the feet of Christ, touching him and praying. Many people have slept there, curled up in the open space between the end of the bench and the feet. Some people have even called 9-1-1 to report a person in distress at the first blast of winter or the cold touch of the feet. Pope Francis remarked that the sculpture is a 'beautiful and excellent representation of Jesus.' 'I was hungry....I was thirsty.....I was a stranger....' The original quote "Preach the gospel at all times. Use words only when necessary" is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi--a man who lived a life of ascetic poverty and followed Jesus Christ's example. The spirit of the quote is good, and it makes a good point. Our actions matter. What is more: actions usually speak louder than words. The Homeless Jesus is a piece of sculpture concealing the identification of gender or age. But this is not just any person. This is Jesus. It is a clear and powerful message of who Jesus was and how he is perceived today to the needy of the world. In this sculpture, He is perceived as the passionate Jesus. The consoling Jesus. An image of Jesus the lonely can hold onto even for a few moments. There is a good reason why the artist left room for someone to sit at the feet of Christ. It is room for us.

It is room for us to relate to Christ as one of the lonely, the hopeless, the widow, the orphan, the vulnerable. It is room for us to stop and take a seat at the feet of Christ. It is room for us to thank God for our families, our church, our homes. It is room for us to seek Christ who

walks with wounded feet. It is room for us to pray before God to heal the nations of want and tyranny. We will not find this an easy endeavor to see Jesus as vulnerable. We can not relate to mountain. Or the Good Shepherd depicting kindness and gentleness. We hate to see Jesus as a product of our pride and greed. We don't want to know how often we hurt Jesus when we ignore a member of his family. But sometimes we do it without realizing it. Sometimes we do it as a safe choice. Sometimes, we are in too big a hurry to stop.

The Homeless Jesus is permanently affixed to a bench to be beaten by blasts of winter and drenched by torrential rains. It is not protected nor sheltered. It is vulnerable to every kind of weather and every kind of graffiti. But through our acknowledgement of the gospel and our understanding of the Word, Jesus will go that road with us.

Believe it or not, the marginalized bring us the very face of Jesus. They express his never-ending stations of the cross. In the journal 'Thinking Faith,' Father O'Collins wrote this, 'In and through the homeless, the refugees, the prisoners, the hungry and sick, Jesus continues to be in agony; in them his passion goes on'. 'I was hungry....I was thirsty.....I was a stranger....'

'Come, sit at my feet, sit still and wait patiently so I may speak to you. I have much to share but few are willing to sit at my feet and listen to me. I never slumber nor sleep. I am not too busy. Come and rest at my feet for a while. Let my feet be the best place for you every day and rest at. This is what I want for everyone. Come, sit at my feet for a while.'

(Paraphrased from 'Come and sit at my feet' an online video by Lastrumpet08)

Amen