

St Joseph & the Cold Weather Shelter

A Quiet Week at the Cold Weather Shelter

[from which I've tried to remove the identifying features...]

- It's been a quiet week at the Cold Weather Shelter
 - We set up a indoor tent city in the Great Room of the Salvation Army, with small collapsable tents...where, for the past week, we've had 8-10 guests per evening.
- I was surprised to see, & not to see, some of the guests there.
 - I did invite _____ who's moved from the Christ Church garage to the lawn mower shed next to the _____.
 - She did thank me for the offer, and said that she would consider it, but she never showed up.
 - I was surprised to see a family with two adults and two middle-school children.
 - Anneke den Haan, a fellow Kiwanis member, was on the 5PM Welcoming Crew, and she recognized the boy, _____, because he is a member of the Kiwanis Builder's Club, the service club for middle school youth
 - His mom works at _____; Dad seems to be the house husband; he was the one who braided his daughter's hair before she left for school
 - And on Tuesday evening, Dad and the two kids piled into the truck and went off to the Middle School, where _____ was playing _____ for the School Concert
 - Many of you also know _____, the medically disabled Postmaster, who we often see in _____
 - He asked if I could help tie open the flaps of his tent; he was nervous about being in a enclosed space, especially since he'd been beat up about a month ago and was worried that he couldn't escape easily
 - We were also graced by the presence of _____, a big guy with a very gruff manner
 - He had been a police officer in Anchorage and a professional bowler, ("You could see me on TV.")

- There are a number of things you can do in bowling alleys:
 - You can bowl
 - You can rent a nice pair of shoes
 - You can buy beer on tap.
 - And that seems to have been _____ downfall. He started to enjoy the beer more than bowling, and with that came loss of license, loss of job, loss of career
 - He blames it on genetics: “there’s a reason why I’m not staying with my relatives this Christmas,” he says. “They’re either dead or in jail.”
 - He did tell me that he has a court date at Skagit Co Superior in two weeks; so he may not be spending Christmas in jail, but he might not need the services of the Cold Weather Shelter after the New Year
- We also had a well-spoken lady there as a guest, a PhD, she noted on the sign-in sheet.
 - She wanted to ensure that we treated her with the respect that she was due as another human being and not just as another homeless person
 - And I could agree with that, until we asked her to help pack up her blankets in a plastic bag in the morning so she could use them the following night upon her return.
 - “Well, I’m not sure I’m coming back. And besides, I’ve got people to meet and things to do.”
 - And with that, she marched out the door, leaving her blankets in a pile in the tent,
 - And with that, she’ll always be known by me as Princess Leia, Ph.D
 - It’s not her fault. It’s the world she inhabits. (Mayo: I understand that you come from an academic background....” The Doctor: “My PhD comes from investigating government officials...”
- A young couple were also on the guest list for the week.
 - _____ is 21; he was a little older. Alexis left the Shelter to visit her mom every morning,

- Mom didn't want her around the house, but mom was taking care of _____', 18-month-old baby, as well as _____' 5-year-old son (who went to kindergarten every morning)
 - (Started doing the math: 16 years old when she had the baby)
- Skye, who brought her service-cat to the Shelter, along with the papers from her doctor to prove that her cat was a service cat

Things I Learned

- First of all I learned that if you walk through all the the drive through the lanes of all the fast-food restaurants that line Commercial Avenue, it's possible to find \$10 in one day from all the money people drop when they get change from the kids behind the counter.
 - (Can't open your car door, and if you go forward 5 feet, someone else has already pulled in behind you.)
- Second, I learned some new vocabulary words, when (at 1:30 AM) I loaned a young lady my phone (hers had been broken by her boyfriend in a mad rage) so she could call her friend, _____. The conversation went like this:
 - You gotta get me outta A-town.
 - He: I can't be seen in a car; I've got warrants.
 - She: I've got a ball, and I'm willing to give that to you to make up for the inconvenience.
 - Did finally arrange to get a girl friend to pick her up at 3:30.
 - Google "ball": 8-ball, which is an eighth of an oz of cocaine or crystal meth

St. Joseph and No Room at the Inn

- All this brought to mind the first homeless person we read about in the New Testament: the carpenter Joseph and his wife, Mary, for whom there was no room in the inn, and who both were obliged to become refugees in Egypt.
- If Joseph would have told his story to the manager of the Cold Weather Shelter in Bethlehem, it might have seemed much like any of the stories heard at the Cold Weather Shelter in Anacortes:

- A wife who was pregnant at an early age under suspicious circumstances
- Both being obliged by an oppressive government to make the 10-day journey between Nazareth and Jerusalem¹
- But what makes his story different?
 - What is it about this refugee and homeless man that makes his story different than all the other stories I heard over the past week.
 - It was the angel. The angel who spoke to Joseph and told him not to be afraid.
- Up until the point that the angel spoke to Joseph, we read that Joseph was a “righteous man”.
 - In the Greek of the Bible, the word “righteous man” could also be translated “law-abiding man,” someone who follows the rules, who is careful and cautious.
 - Carpenters by their very nature are cautious and careful: “measure twice, cut once” is their rule.
- As a cautious and law-abiding man, Joseph would have been well within the boundaries of the Law if he followed the teachings given in Deuteronomy with respect to the penalties for women found to be pregnant before marriage: “to be stoned to death at the entrance to her father’s house.”
 - Although, as a law-abiding man, Joseph would have obeyed God’s commands all his life,
 - But in this case, with Mary and the baby, named “God with Us” and the angel, there wasn’t a lot of good options available
 - On his own, Joseph couldn’t recognize the right thing to do,
 - But with the help of the angel, Joseph understood that “righteousness” means more than just “law abiding.”
 - “Law abiding” is a good way to live in the “measure-twice-and-cut-once” world of carpentry.
 - Joseph could have settled the issue with Mary by strictly adhering to the Law of Moses.

¹ <https://www.reference.com/geography/distance-between-nazareth-bethlehem-6ac7e95c8360c7c7#>

- But no matter how much the Law of Moses communicated the will of God, the Law of Moses just doesn't cover every situation.
 - So Joseph found himself perplexed.
- Joseph found his way out of this perplexing situation by way of a Messenger.
 - Joseph trusted the messenger without hesitation.
 - It seems that from a lifetime of applying Gods word his daily life, Joseph recognized this, indeed, was the Messenger from God when he heard the words, "Do not be afraid." ...words that had been repeated over and over again in the Torah.
 - Perhaps as a righteous and law-abiding man, Joseph listened for Gods voice in the expected places, and perhaps that enabled him to be ready to trust an unexpected messenger from God.
 - From the story of Joseph I understand that it is possible for God to speak directly to us.
 - This speech might be from the words of a friend, or a stranger, or it might occur during the words of the liturgy.
 - We Episcopalians have it in our DNA that God can speak directly to us:
 - It's a byproduct of our theology of the three-legged stool of Scripture, Tradition and Reason.
 - There are, indeed, many ways that God does speak to us.
- I believe that when God does speak to us, it's usually to get us out of the measure-twice-cut-once world that is so comforting and comfortable.
 - I'm tempted to live a careful and cautious life:
 - I try to keep most of the commandments; I try to do more good than bad; I try not to judge, and I try to give away that surplus cash that I don't need.
 - I believe that God is inviting us in this season of Advent to stop being so cautious
 - In the Advent season we're asked to put things in perspective:
 - That's why we hear all those readings about End Times; Christian eschatology
 - That in the Grand Scheme of Things, we no longer have to be afraid; we no longer need to be cautious

Advent 4 2016

Sunday, 18December2016

- We need to spend more time just listening for the messengers and putting those messages into action and into serving Jesus the Christ throughout the year.