

THE HOMELESS PERSON

The parking lot filled rapidly on Sunday morning as members of the large church congregation filed into church. As usually happens in a church that size, each member had developed a certain comfort zone - a block of space within those four church walls that became theirs after the second or third sitting.

It was as much a part of their church experience as the recliner was to the television at home. Some of the older members has been sitting in the same row on the same side for several decades. A team of oxen could not have moved them to the opposite side of the church.

One morning a stranger stood at the edge of the parking lot near a dumpster. As families parked cars and piled out, they noticed him rummaging through the trash. "Oh no I don't believe it," whispered a lady to her husband. "That's all we need ---- a bunch of homeless people milling around here."

One worried little girl tugged on her dad's sleeve. "But Daddy...."

Daddy was busy sizing up the bearded stranger, whose baggy, outdated trousers and faded flannel shirt and dusted too many park benches.

"Don't stare at him, honey," he whispered, and hurried her inside.

Soft music filled the high-ceiling sanctuary as churchgoers settled into their usual spots. The choir sang an opening chorus, "In his presence there is comfort In His presence there is peace..."

Sunlight suddenly flooded the centre aisle. The double doors swung open and the homeless man, sloppy and stooped, headed toward the front.

“Oh no, it’s him” somebody muttered.

“What does he think he’s doing, anyway?” snapped an incredulous usher.

The stranger set his bagful of dumpster treasures on the first pew which had been upholstered in an expensive soft teal fabric just three months ago. The music stopped. And before anyone had a chance to react, he ambled up the stairs and stood behind the fine, handcrafted oak podium, where he faced a wide-eyed congregation.

The dishevelled stranger spoke haltingly at first, in a low, clear voice. Unbuttoning and removing his top layer old clothing, he described Jesus , and the love He has for all people.

“Jesus possesses a sensitivity and love that far surpasses that any of us deserves.”

Stepping out of the baggy old trousers, the stranger went on to describe a forgiveness that is available to each and every one of us.... Without strings attached.

“Unconditionally He loves us. Unconditionally He gave His very life for us. Unconditionally and forever, we can have the peace and assurance that no matter who we are, where we’ve come from, or how badly we may have mistreated others or ourselves, there is hope.”

“In Jesus, there is always hope.”

“You see, my friends, it is never too late to change,” the man continued.

“He is the Author of change, and the provider of forgiveness. He came to bring new meaning to ‘life’.”

Men and women squirmed as reality hit them like an electrical current. The stranger tugged at knotted gray beard, and removed it.

“I’m here to tell you that we are loved with a love far beyond human understanding, a love that enables us to accept and love others in return.” Then tenderly he added, “Let’s pray together.”

That wise priest – under the guise of a homeless “nobody” – did not preach a sermon that day, but every person left with plenty to think about.

Author Unknown.