

## **“I Was Hungry”**

Matthew 25:31-46

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Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ <sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Prayer.

**I was hungry.**

Did you even see me?

I saw you.

You were coming out of the supermarket.

I was the older man  
gray hair and a beard.

You remember, don't you?

I was wearing the orange vest  
fetching carts from the parking lot  
pushing stacks of twenty  
through the slush  
to the holding area  
just inside the store.

I make six dollars an hour

but that's going up to six seventy-five January  
first.

Thats twelve thousand four hundred eighty a  
year.

I don't resent the fact  
people come out with their  
carts piled high  
free turkeys if you have earned enough points  
deals and coupons aplenty  
stuffing the trunk or cargo space of their SUVs  
with enough food to feed a king.

It's just hard.

Hard to think about  
my three kids eating tonight.  
Oh, yea they get the free lunch at school  
but it's night time when they start complaining.  
That's when I get home  
around nine  
just in time to get them to bed.  
If I'm lucky  
the deli gal  
will load me up with  
a bag of out-of-date food.  
That's when I'm living large,  
let me tell you.

My money goes to the RG&E  
the landlord  
and the phone company.  
There's nothing left  
for food  
or trips to the doctor.  
So we get by  
with the help of the food pantry  
and a few friends.  
One day at a time,  
I say to myself.  
One day at a time.

Truly I tell you,  
just as you did it to one  
of the least of these  
who are members of my family,  
you did it to me.

**I was thirsty.**

I was the woman in the red dress.  
I came here to Zion a few weeks ago.  
You remember me, don't you?  
I smiled and shook your hand.  
It was as if you looked right through me

even while you told me  
that it was nice to meet me.

To tell you the truth  
it was the first time  
I've been in a church in 30 years.  
Ever since the break up  
the bickering and fighting  
scandal and shame  
I figured that if this is the way  
Christians act  
I'm not bringing my kids to church.  
I don't want them growing up like that.  
So I stopped coming, too.  
To tell the truth  
I love sleeping in Sunday mornings.  
I still do.

But it felt like I was walking in a desert  
dry and hot  
windswept and sand.  
Oh, everything else has been alright.  
The kids graduated from college and married.  
My husband and I have done well-  
he even cashed out  
and took an early retirement.  
Imagine that,  
54 and life is easy.  
But I'm dry  
parched  
thirsty  
for something substantial  
thirsty  
for something spiritual  
thirsty  
for a connection with God.

So, I stopped in  
a few weeks ago

this is the church down the road  
cold calling  
the first stop in an effort  
to find a drink  
to quench my spiritual thirst.

Truly I tell you,  
just as you did it to one  
of the least of these  
who are members of my family,  
you did it to me.

**I was a stranger.**

I know, I know  
the Eastern suburbs  
don't have people like me.  
So I must be from the City  
from Clifford or Portland  
Conky or Lyle  
where the dealers and hookers  
work their sidewalk trade.  
If you thought that I'm from the inner city  
that I got on the wrong RGRTA  
you thought wrong, my friend.  
I live in your neighborhood.  
I live on your street.  
We pass every day  
on our way to work.

I am black  
and I am gay  
and I am an American  
who lives on your street  
so what are you going to do about it  
stranger?  
Hide the kids?  
Don't talk to strangers?  
I'm not interested in your kids, neighbor.  
Nervously look the other way

but quickly step inside and lock all the doors  
when a black man drives by?  
Please.  
I've never been a thief.

I have nothing to prove to you, stranger.  
We've raised our kids  
adopted them from Korea  
sent them to college on scholarships.  
I've risen higher in my company  
than any of you could ever expect.  
I've fought discrimination all my life  
gay hating crowds  
bigots from every walk of life  
Lilly white Christians  
who talk "welcome"  
while at the same time  
you flinch with fear.

But I'm a person, too!  
Made in the image of God.  
Don't you get it?  
I want to know my Lord.  
I want to live like my Lord.  
I want to be with my Lord.  
I want to become more than strangers  
with my Lord;  
Just like you.

But you can't fool me.  
I've seen the look before  
I've felt your shrug.  
Will the day ever come  
when we will become more than strangers?

Truly I tell you,  
just as you did it to one  
of the least of these  
who are members of my family,

you did it to me.

**I was naked.**

You remember, don't you?  
It was the bathroom of Dunkin Donuts.  
I was hoping you'd forget.  
You surprised me  
I turned beat red  
and had to cover whatever I could.

I have to fly under the radar  
of the employees  
or else they'll kick me out.  
So I leave my shopping cart  
around back by the dumpster.  
If you leave it by the door  
they come looking for you  
and then you're sunk.

The city court judges know me well.  
They just throw out the charges  
and send me back to the women's shelter  
but there isn't any privacy there  
so I use the bathroom of  
McDonalds or Burger King  
- what ever is in the neighborhood.  
All I need is a little hot water  
and I can be smelling good in no time.  
I used to live at Willard  
but then they sent me to DePaul.  
I could never get along  
and the medicine makes me stupid  
so I quit taking it  
and walked out.  
Besides, I like beer better.  
I may be killing brain cells  
or turning my liver to stone  
but who cares about a homeless woman?  
Who gives a plug nickel if I live or die?

I don't turn as many tricks as I use to  
but if I need the beer  
and I haven't collected enough cans or bottles  
well, a woman has to do what a woman has to  
do.

If it weren't for the mittens, hats, and coats  
I get at Cameron Community  
I don't know how I'd survive  
these Rochester winters.

Oh, yea, you can huddle over a vent  
in a parking garage stairwell  
- at least it gets you out of the wind -  
but you can't stay there forever.

Eventually people start coming to work  
and you got to move on.

Most days I hear the voices  
telling me to do bad things  
but I just pray to God  
get me through just one more day  
just one more day  
just one more day.

And you know what?  
He does.

A scrap of bread here  
a tossed out flannel shirt there  
and before you know it  
it's spring  
and the sun is warm on my face  
once again.

Truly I tell you,  
just as you did it to one  
of the least of these  
who are members of my family,  
you did it to me.

**I was sick.**

You thought I was just getting old

That I was becoming senile  
and mean.  
That's old Mr. Jones  
you told your children.  
Don't go walking through his yard.  
He's got hardening of the arteries.  
He's crazy as a loon  
He'll come out with a broom  
and chase you off his property.  
So my house is known  
as haunted  
and avoided  
by every child in the neighborhood.  
Truth be told  
I used to love children.  
Worked for the Y  
back when it meant  
Young Men's Christian Association.  
Pushed the broom, clean the toilets  
and locked the doors  
for thirty plus years  
making sure that every kid  
had someplace to go.

Now I'm old and worn out  
and my mind isn't what it use to be.  
I can't remember today any better  
than I can remember the man in the moon.  
The doctor says my sickness  
causes my ears not to work  
and for my sight to go.  
I know because  
he wrote it down for me.  
I can read it over and over again,  
but as soon as I put the Doctor's note down  
I've forgot what I forgot.

Since I've been sick in the head  
not many of my family

or friends  
stop by much anymore.  
It is as if they want me out of sight  
and out of mind.  
It's not enough for my  
brain to treat me like a stranger  
but for everyone else  
to treat me the same way, too,  
man, oh man, that hurts.

I went to the rummage sale  
down at your church, reverend,  
two or three summers ago.  
I don't know, I got confused.  
I asked where my wife was  
and a kid looked at me an said,  
what's the matter with you Gramps?  
Grandma died ten years ago.  
And everyone laughed.  
That's one thing I haven't forgotten-  
how lonely I feel  
how cut off I am  
from everyone I love  
because my brain makes me sick.

So I sit here alone  
don't bother to turn on the light  
just set here  
with my memories of when I was young  
life was so real  
and I remember,  
yes, I remember  
sitting in Church that Easter morning  
when the trumpets began that hymn  
"Christ the Lord, Is Risen Today"  
Yes, sir  
I sang  
I sang those Alleluias  
until I couldn't sing no longer

and we went home to turkey and gravy.  
We went home  
to the house at the end of your road.  
That's old Mr. Jones  
you told your children.  
Don't go walking through his yard.  
He's got hardening of the arteries.  
He's crazy as a loon  
He'll come out with a broom  
and chase you off his property.

Truly I tell you,  
just as you did it to one  
of the least of these  
who are members of my family,  
you did it to me.

### **I was in prison.**

You've seen the inside of a jail cell?  
Yea, right. Roger that,  
jerk.  
The only jail you've seen is  
on T.V. or in the movies.  
You think it's like Otis and Mayberry  
come and go as you please?  
Wake up and smell the coffee,  
friend.  
This ain't no show.  
This is the big house  
and you'd better keep your back to the wall.

I've been behind bars  
more than half the number of years  
that I've been alive.  
Not once have I had a visitor.  
Not once did anyone call.  
No family.  
No friends.  
No preacher.

Nothing.  
Oh, there is a chaplain alright.  
Thanks for paying his salary.  
Not.  
He can't do a dang thing for any of us.  
He can't sway the board.  
He can't talk to the warden  
He can't even go to the bathroom  
without permission from the guards.  
All he can do is sit there  
Sit there and listen  
to the sob story  
each of us tell.  
But after awhile  
there isn't anything else to tell  
so I stopped going.  
What's the point?

Don't even start to feel sorry for me.  
I'm getting what I deserve.  
I killed a man  
in a bar  
over a woman.  
I killed him with my knuckles  
after he first messed me up.  
Still,  
that isn't any excuse.  
I'm getting what I'm getting.  
And no one gives a darn.  
Not the preacher.  
Not the bishop.  
Not the pope.

I did get one letter  
one time  
from the born-again brother  
of the man I killed.  
He said, burn in hell  
you S.O.B.

Burn in hell and like it  
because that's where you'll spend eternity.  
Yea, brother  
and I'll see you there.

I'm going to die here  
not of old age, shoot no.  
I'm going to die here  
not at the hand of another violent felon,  
heck, I can defend myself.  
I'm going to die here  
die of loneliness  
because I have become  
the least  
the lost  
the hopeless cause  
of a God who has kept me at a distance.

Angry? You bet.  
At a father who taught me how to loose my  
temper  
At a mother who neglected me like the bad  
apple I became  
At the teachers who gave up and tossed me  
out  
At the church who Sunday school teacher told  
me to  
go home and don't come back.  
So if you would come visit me,  
not that I ever expect you to,  
know that I've got baggage  
some real baggage  
to sort through  
before we can even begin to start talking  
about what Jesus has done for me.  
Because  
from where I sit  
it doesn't look like nothing.

Truly I tell you,

just as you did it to one  
of the least of these  
who are members of my family,  
you did it to me.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.