

Motive and Opportunity

Sometimes it's those unexpected "Lenten moments" that teach us the most about ourselves

by Linda McCullough Moore



It's a dreary day full of half-hearted rains and iffy breezes. At least an all-out storm would feel more purposeful. I'm inching down the street in stop-and-go traffic as it slows to cross the bridge that has been under construction for as long as I can remember.

Standing in the verge is a forlorn looking man in a hooded raincoat holding a large cardboard sign that says "Homeless Family. Will You Help?" Under the word "Family" there's an arrow pointing in the general direction of the trees, but I can see no family huddling in the woods, taking shelter.

The traffic, for the first time in the history of the bridge, starts moving at a lively pace, at least for the twenty yards that puts me well beyond the point where I can roll down my window and offer a

few dollar bills of encouragement to the dripping stranger.

God offers me another ten minutes on the bridge to consider my alternatives. The one my *heart* likes is where I turn around and pick up the man - and his wife and kiddies who materialize from the foliage. I drive them to my house, the children giggling in the back seat, holding frosty-fingered hands across their mouths to hide their wide-eyed smiles. And then it's hot showers all around. I wash and dry their clothes. Warm and clean, we all sit at the table by the fireplace and drink hot chocolate and strong black tea and nibble crumbly fresh-baked currant scones with butter and blackberry jam. The smallest child picks the currants out and makes a little pile. "For later," he explains.

In the next scenario, the one my *head* likes, I drive home like everybody else

and once there I call the homeless shelter and describe his plight. "Well, I'm not certain what you think we can do," the receptionist says. "Well, send somebody out," I start to say. "Send somebody out and put the whole family and all their worldly goods tied up in plastic bags into your van, and take them to the shelter where you house and feed them, get the dad a job, and the mom a prescription for that cough, the kids new shoes - that fit - and the whole crew a home where they can live for the next three generations if they take a notion to." But I can't bring myself to say all this to her, not even in a stalled-traffic fantasy.

"What would Jesus do?" is a question that doesn't occur to me. Instead, above the chatter on the radio, a different question runs through my head: "What would you do if that was Jesus standing back there in the rain?"

Ahhh!

What if He meant it when He said, "What you do unto one of the least of these, you do unto Me."

Ahhh.

Finally, across the bridge, I pull into the left lane and make a sharp u-turn and head back in the other direction. "If he's not still there when I arrive, I'll kill him," I think to myself.

But what will I do when I get there? I can't drive him anywhere. After making the mistake of watching *In Cold Blood* when I was little, I have a strong aversion to ax-murderers and therefore will never pick up a hitchhiker, even a soaking wet one.

I check my wallet. Empty.



I dig through the bottom of my purse and come up with two tens and a couple ones. I put them in my pocket. I'll call him a cab to drive them to the shelter, I decide. That will leave them with at least fifteen dollars.

I pull into a small parking area some distance away, and in the rain that has decided to pick up now, I walk over and ask him to tell me his story.

He's young and strong and sounds like a bit of a defeatist. He tells me that his son lives with this grandmother and his little girls live with a friend. He mentions no wife and I don't inquire.

He says he's trying to get \$535 for a security deposit for an apartment. I mention a job. He tells me there is none. I say I don't think anyone will stop to give him money here and he tells me the police have already chased him. I say if

he could only get some work that would be more reliable and he tells me I've already said that six times.

He may be right. My children tell me I repeat myself.

He says he's going to see about a job this afternoon. I hand him \$22 and ask him his name – Jedeem – and tell him I will pray that he gets the job. I wish him luck. He says God bless me.

And I walk away.

So what's the verdict? Did I change his life? I don't think so. Was he pleased I took the trouble? He gave no indication. Did I act from guilt? Used to – all the time. But this rainy Tuesday morning I'm pretty sure I turned the car around and sat in traffic, chatted with Jedeem, gave him the money I had, because I wanted to train my heart and mind to act in unison.

There were no fireworks, no miracles as far as I could tell. I did what I would do if it were Jesus standing there. Not much. A little. Something. I didn't take him home with me. I don't think he would have come. But I believe that bit by little bit, my God will make me someone who will grow in grace, who can show better mercy, more sure compassion, give more useful help.

Yes, God moved me inches down that path today, and probably laughed with us when I told my kids that night at supper how my repetitious chatter bothers strangers on life's roadways just as much as it bothers them.

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PRECIOUS WORDS

by Maria Ellis

Have you ever heard a child say something concerning God or other spiritual matters that was very profound or just plain cute? Here are a few treasures uttered from the mouths of our little ones.

A Caring Hand

Looking pensively at the crucifix one day, my 3-year-old daughter Elizabeth said, "They need to take the nails out and put band-aids on."

In His Hands

My daughter Megan, age 2 ½, was sitting at the dinner table when she said, "When I grow up I will go on the cross like Jesus. He will hold me."

The Cure

I was showing my daughter Regina, 2, the crucifix and told her that Jesus was bleeding just like her dad was when he cut himself shaving. She responded, "Toilet paper will help!"

Eggs-actly!

My 3-year-old son, Andy, in an attempt to explain Easter declared, "It's when Jesus comes down from the cross and gives us an Easter egg!"

Curtain Call

I arrived with my 3-year-old son to Adoration to find Jesus was reposed. After we prayed for a few minutes, the priest came into the chapel, opened the tabernacle, parted the veil, and placed Jesus (in the monstrance) on the altar. My son tugged at my sleeve and whispered up to me, "See Momma, Jesus was here after all. He was just in the shower!"

"...the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Mark 10:14

To have your child's "Precious Words" printed in this article, please email preciouswords@catholic.org for consideration.