

Proverbs 22: 1-2, 8-9, 22-23
Psalms 125
James 2: 1-10, 11-13, 14-17
Mark 7: 24-37
The Rev. Dr. W. Carter Lofton

Lord, may the words that I speak, be the words that you would want spoken. Amen

I hope that you were listening carefully to the readings this morning, because my message to you is directly related to you having me as the deacon in this parish. It is of utmost importance that you not only hear the words from Proverbs, but that you always act according to what they say. “Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor. The rich and the poor have this in common; the Lord is the maker of them all.” James writes, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?” All persons are beloved children of God; everyone needs to be treated that way.

The favoritism that James writes about is something we need to always have in the front of our minds. It is quite an experience to go into a homeless shelter or any gathering place for the homeless and be dressed the same as they are. As you gather around with them, they accept you and you can enter into whatever discussion or activity that is going on. Then when you leave that group, still dressed in something other than your finest attire, and go to the front desk or become involved with certain people that operate the shelter, it is an entirely different feeling. When you

were to ask if you could get a room or something to eat, many times you have to step back a bit or they might bite your heads off. It is amazing how quick they can answer you with negative thoughts and quickly let you know who is in charge of that place. I have seen many times how the homeless are handled wrongly. After standing in line and seeing someone in front of me being handled improperly, I would mention to the front desk person that they were rather quick or rude with that the person in front of me; they seemed to always have an excuse as to why they were that way with that person. Now this is not the case in all the shelters, and there is a definite trend to make sure this no longer occurs, but I think we all need to be mindful of how we judge people by their appearance.

I want to tell you a thing about how great you are here at Holy Comforter. We were the first church to sign up to do Room in the Inn, and for those that do not know what it is all, about let me explain to you how it works. Churches, schools, synagogues, and other not for profit organizations take homeless people in for a night during the cold winter months December-March. We pick them up from the Urban Ministry Center and transport them to our church on Saturday nights, which allows us to invite them to our worship service on Sunday. We give them supper, have Bible study, and time for watching TV. They have a place warm to sleep and then get breakfast in the morning before transporting them back to the Center. When I announced to the congregation that we were going to do this program, there was a rift among the parishioners that this was not going to be a good idea, because the homeless people

would steal the Bibles that are in the Sunday school classrooms and they might cause harm to the people that were going to spend the night. I insisted that we do the program and I was told that I had to put locks on the doors where the guests were sleeping and a dead bolt lock on the door where our volunteers would be staying for the night. I placed the locks on the doors and we began the program. The first Saturday night the dead bolt was set and maybe the next time it was also set, but from then on I never saw the locks being used. The people responded to the need and realized that all the people wanted was a warm place to sleep and something to eat. Some years later when it became a little difficult to get enough volunteers, I announced that we might have to no longer be part of Room in the Inn. One parishioner came up to me and said; “If you call off this program you are going to face a lot of angry people in this parish, and we will run the program without your help.” We continued on with Room in the Inn, and we have never had trouble getting volunteers again. You stretched yourselves more than you thought possible and did what God calls you to do.

Do not dishonor the poor, love your neighbor as yourself, and show mercy to everyone. Remember what the Rev. Billy Graham said, “It is not for me to judge, it is for me to love.”

In this world today as it has always been, it is easy to get distracted from our mission to Love our neighbor as ourselves and to love God above all else. There were times in life when we did not have so many conveniences like we do today, which were invented to make our lives easier.

Why you had to find a pay phone to make a phone call, and when they were first invented, they did not even make change. Phone calls were five cents and if all you had was a dime and you put that in to make a call, the call cost you a dime instead of a nickel. Washing machines were just what they said they were - they only washed clothes. To get the water out of the clothes, you had to remove the wet heavy clothes from the washer and put them through a wringer that was on the back of the machine. You would have to be very careful or your arm could end up going through the wringer, and that was very painful. I can attest to the amount of pain that is felt when you screamed to your mother to come help you open the wringer as your arm was being pinched beyond belief. Life now has many better machines that are supposed to make life easier, but we can discuss that at another time.

So what can we do to make sure we continue to do what God wants us to do in this lifetime; not allowing these conveniences to take over our lives so that we are not open and accessible to all people?

In the eighteenth century a five-pound mass of steel was worth about \$5. If you took that five-pound mass and made horseshoes out of it became worth about \$50. If you stretched it into sewing needles, which they used a lot of in homes and in the textile trade, that five pounds of steel became worth about \$250. If you took that same five-pounds of steel and stretched it into springs for watches, which a lot of them were used in Switzerland, that same five-pounds of steel became worth about \$250,000.

To be worth more, a lot of times we have to stretch ourselves more than we think we can, but with God's love and our faith and hope; we need to always stretch ourselves to do what we are called to do.

Amen