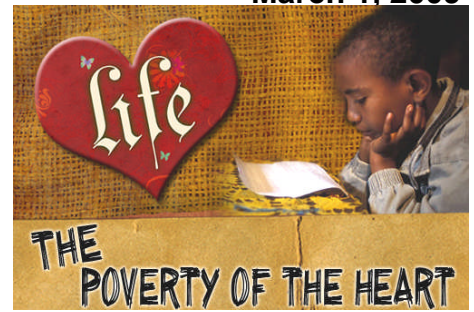


The first step on the journey is to understand the poverty of the heart, to search our hearts and ask why it's sometimes so hard to help those in need. How are things like materialism and individualism stifling compassion? On the journey, we'll set down the burden of guilt and pick up God's grace instead.



Isaiah 40:28-31 (NIV) Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Reflections

The Mitten Tree has been a Christmas fixture at St. John – a long-standing tradition it seemed. So this season the Knit and Crochet Group decided to take over the Tree. In the midst of all the issues of the “economic downturn”, it seemed more important than ever to do what we could for those who were in need.

In the planning process, the conversation turned to “Who should receive the mittens and hats and scarves and gloves?” We wanted to really serve the local community, rather than give the items generically to the Salvation Army. During a “One Month to Live” group, we discovered that some St. John members had no idea that there are poor and homeless people in Howard County. And thus the idea was born to give the “fruits” of the Mitten Tree to the Route 1 Ministry.

Oh – wait... do I hear someone asking that same question? Are there homeless and poor in Howard County?

The answer, sad to say, is YES. Drive a minute from the church, to the intersection of Routes 1 and 175,

and you will always find someone with a sign, seeking handouts from drivers stopped at the light. In the right weather, you can look through the trees that grow there in the middle of the divided highway and see cardboard shelters.

If you head south on Route 1, almost to Savage, where the Route 32 exit bears right, there is a small place called the Day Resource Center. Three days each week, homeless people who live along the Route 1 corridor can come to get a shower, find information and have meals. There is a pantry where they can get food items to take with them.

One Saturday in January, St. John members took several boxes of hats, scarves and gloves (“no mittens please – they find it too difficult to

manage with mittens”) from the Tree. More have been taken since. Men who had just come in from the streets cheerfully carried the boxes up the metal stairway, thrilled to hear that some more gloves and hats had arrived.

Yes, some of these people live almost in the shadow of our church building, near Routes 1 and 175. Some of us drive past them regularly en route to church or work or shopping. And by taking warm clothes, individual serving packages of food, and praying for them, we can help them.

More importantly, God will use us to help them “... renew their strength ... run and not be weary ... walk and not faint.”

— Wendy Woods

My Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank you for blessing me with comfort in this life. Thank you for the roof over my head and the food on my table. Thank you that you want to bless me and give me good gifts. But I have become blinded by wealth, not seeing it for what it is. Please help me to daily appreciate the blessings you have given me. Help me not to be tightfisted with them, but to open my hands to share with others as well. I want to be a steward of my wealth to help others. Please guide me as I seek to do this. Amen

Readings

Sunday, March 1

Isaiah 40:28-31

What does Isaiah tell you about hope? What are you hoping for through your time of study in this series?

Monday, March 2

Proverbs 30:8-9

You are among the financially elite in the world. Billions of people do not have their basic needs met. How does this perspective affect you? Examine your spending patterns and consider if they are as God would have them.

Tuesday, March 3

Matthew 16:26

Distraction is a shield against reality. How can you overcome a tendency to not get involved in others' lives?...to stay too busy to help?

Wednesday, March 4

James 4:17

"Mercy goes beyond justice...Mercy is costly. Look what it cost God: the infinitely precious life of his own Son." (Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*) What about poverty makes you shudder? What costs get in your way to offering help?

Thursday, March 5

1 John 5:3-4

Compassion is not motivated or sustained by guilt. It flows from our love for Christ, who loved us first. Examine any sense of guilt you experience about the poor. Pray about what God will do with the love that is inside of you.

Friday, March 6

Isaiah 58:1-3, 5-7

What about this reading challenges you? Lent is traditionally a time of fasting or giving up something. What would be a sacrifice you could offer that would be a blessing to others? Pray for God's leading.

Saturday, March 7

Isaiah 58:8-11

What can you infer from Isaiah about how God will help you in serving others? Who will you seek out this weekend among the marginalized to listen to and encourage? Pray for God's leading.

Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at biblegateway.com.

Resource for this series:

"Hope Lives: A Journey of Restoration" Copyright © 2008
Amber Van Schooneveld.

Gross National Income Per Capita 2003 in U.S. Dollars

Switzerland	\$39,880
United States	37,610
Japan	34,510
United Kingdom	28,350
Mexico	6,230
Egypt	1,390
India	530
Bangladesh	400
Kenya	390
Ethiopia	90