

April 28, 2024

## Clip In To the Community

Judges 19:16-20

16 At last, after evening fell, an old man coming in from his work in the fields noticed them. He was not of the people of Benjamin, but a man from the hill country of Ephraim who was living in Gibeah. <sup>17</sup>The old man saw them sitting there in the square.

**Old Man:** Where are you going? Where are you from?

**Levite:** <sup>18</sup>We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to the far parts of the hill country of Ephraim. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am returning to my home. No one yet has offered us hospitality. <sup>19</sup>We, your servants, have straw and food for the donkeys, and we also have bread and wine, enough for me, my mistress, and my young servant. We don't require anything else.

**Old Man:** <sup>20</sup>Peace be with you. I will take care of everything you need, but do not spend the night in the square.

Video: Phil Collins-Another Day in Paradise (Official Lyrics Video)

She calls out to the man on the street

(Refrain)

"Sir, can you help me?

It's cold and I've nowhere to sleep

Bridge: Oh Lord, is there nothing more  
anybody can do?

Is there somewhere you can tell me?"

Oh Lord, there must be something  
you can say.

He walks on, doesn't look back

He pretends he can't hear her

Starts to whistle as he crosses the street

Seems embarrassed to be there

You can tell from the lines on her face  
You can see that she's been there  
Probably been moved on

(Refrian)

Oh, think twice, 'cause it's another day  
for you and me in paradise

Oh, think twice, 'cause it's another day  
for you

You and me in paradise

Think about it

from every place  
'Cause she didn't fit in there

(Refrain)

hmmm

para-paradise

(Refrain x2)

She calls out to the man on the street

He can see she's been crying

She's got blisters on the soles of her feet

She can't walk but she's trying

To see the full video go to: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=At9FypGZ44M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=At9FypGZ44M)

Message:

Just think about it.

That was the hit song from the late 80's written, sung and produced by British drummer and singer Phil Collins. He sings the song from a third-person perspective, as he observes a man crossing the street to ignore a homeless woman. Collins calls his listeners not to turn a blind eye to the homelessness, by drawing some religious allusion that "it's just another day for you and me in paradise." During the bridge of the song Collins appeals directly to God by singing, "Oh Lord, is there nothing more anybody can do? Oh Lord, there must be something you can say."

Well, the "them" in today's scripture reading are not homeless. If you read the previous fifteen verses that were assigned in preparation for today, then you probably could figure out that the "them" in verse sixteen was a Levite, his mistress (or secondary wife or concubine, depending on what translation you read) and his servant.

It's rather ironic that I pulled this scripture out of the last few chapters of the book of Judges as it chronicles the moral degeneration of Israel after their former leader, Joshua, had passed, and before Saul was anointed King of Israel. In fact, when you read the book as a whole, you can see not only the people, including their leadership, spiraling down, doing, as it repeatedly says, "what was evil in the sight of the Lord." By the end of chapter 16, there are no more formal judges leading over the people, so by the time you get today's scripture in chapter 19, the stories become completely reprehensible.

But despite the complete and utter moral decline of the people, there is one elderly man who remembers the vital role hospitality plays. Extending hospitality to strangers was an important and the deeply held custom in the ancient near east and particularly so to Israel. The hospitality to a stranger was mandated by Levitical law. In fact, if you recall last week the memory verse from Leviticus 19 reads you must treat the outsider as one of your native born people as a full citizen and you are to love him in the same way you love yourself;" that was from verse 34a. The second-half of that verse explains the why, "for remember, you were once strangers living in Egypt." (Leviticus 19: 34b) They needed to remember their own experience of being strangers in a strange land.

The Deuteronomic law further supported this concept in chapter 10 where it tells us that "[God] loves foreigners, making sure they have food and clothing. You must love those foreigners living with you in the same way." Again, it tells us why, saying, "remember how you were foreigners in the land of Egypt!" (Deuteronomy 10: 18B-19) Hospitality was a social custom and antiquity and was a significant mark of honor. Conversely, being inhospitable was a significant mark of social shame.

Despite the moral depravity that was evident in the community of Gibeah, there was at least one person who still had some level of respect towards the practice of

hospitality. So, when this elderly man came in from in from the fields and saw the Levite, his mistress and servant in the city square, he not only got to know him, he went to a higher level of hospitality by inviting them to stay at his house, and if you happened to read on to the next verse it tells us, “the old man took them home and fed their donkeys. They washed the dust off the road from their feet, ate, and drank.” (Judges 19:21)

If you read on from there, you will get a very graphic idea of what would have happened to this Levite and company, had they remained in the city square. This is not to say that everything ends well for the traveling threesome, remember the point of the book is to illustrate the depravity Israel had become as a whole. My point at focusing on the first portion of chapter 19 was to highlight that as far down as Israel had come, there was one person in this particular community who was willing to clip in and take hospitality to another level. Rather than turning a blind eye, he took action.

Do we turn a blind eye regarding other people’s needs? Do we turn a blind eye to homelessness here in the greater community? And before you argue that you don’t see images like what was seen in the video in Reedsburg or Sauk County for that matter, keep in mind that homelessness in rural Wisconsin looks very different than it does in major cities like Chicago or New York.

What does homelessness look like in Sauk and other rural counties of Wisconsin? It’s the person you see at Kwik Trip, putting gas in their car whose car is jam packed with all of their worldly possessions. The less noticeable homeless, whom you may not recognize unless you are acquainted with them, are those who take up residence in a friend’s living room, sacking out on a couch. Sure, this gives them a safe place to stay for the night, however, while their practical needs are being met, the underlying cause of their homelessness remains unaddressed. So, eventually they wear out their welcome. If they are lucky, they have another friend with a spare couch and it goes on and on.

So, what can you do? Or more specifically, what can we as a church body do? Well, if you have stayed attuned to the newsletter in the last year or so, especially the Servant Leadership Board’s monthly synopsis, you are aware that we have been entertaining the possibilities of transforming one of the classroom bathrooms into a handicap accessible bathroom, which we hope to include a shower. Why a shower? Well, we were originally inspired by the opportunity we had back, before COVID, when a group of cyclists were riding across the states from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine, who requested a stay overnight in the church. But they needed a shower. We did find a way to accommodate them, with the help of the city pool, but might we find a missional use for a shower the next time some group is passing through town? Think about it. How might God be calling us to use that shower?

A couple of years before the pandemic, I think it was around the time Reedsburg had their second hundred year flood in ten years, we looked into the possibility of

making the church available for needs that might arise from an unexpected disaster in the community or even for individual households. Tom Hirschinger met with a representative from the Red Cross, who after inspecting the church affirmed having RUMC registered as a secondary emergency shelter in Sauk County. The primary being in Baraboo. Think about it. We didn't need a shower to get that distinction, but might God be calling us to get one in preparation for something yet to come?

Or what if God is calling us to partner with the organization Family Promise, to create a chapter for Sauk County based out of Reedsburg? If you're not familiar with Family Promise it is an organization that addresses family homelessness. According to their website, 2.5 million children experience homelessness here in the US, yearly. In the short term, this puts them in a much greater risk for academic failure and mental health crises. In the long term, they are more likely to experience homelessness in adulthood.

Family Promise brings communities together forming partnerships with local organizations to implement solutions that ensure families have a secure place to call home and a bright future. They do more than give them a place to stay for the night, they help them recover from the situation they brought them to a homelessness status in the first place.

We have a lot of unused space in this building, especially since the non-profit preschool Kid's Korner closed its doors. Might God be calling us to use the shower as part of a Family Promise Day Center, that is a central location for the adults to come to learn important skills that can help them rise above homelessness? Where they can learn skills such as money management, practicing job interviews, writing resumes, nutritional tips, all kinds of things that will do more than give them a warm place to stay.

Family Promise recognizes that housing alone won't solve family homelessness. It's a crisis that requires an integrated approach that addresses all the issues that can lead to the loss of a home. Which is why their mission is to "prevent and end homelessness for families with children and help them achieve sustainable independence through a community-based response." Think about it. Might God be calling us to be a part of that community-based response?

I don't know if that is what God will have us use the shower for. That is something that we will have to further discern, as we move forward towards that vision of the bathroom renovation. What I do know is that whatever we use it for, it will enable us to more opportunities to clip in to the larger community. It will provide greater opportunities to express hospitality and compassion to those in need.

Just think about it.

Let us pray.

## Next Steps

- I will ponder/memorize/meditate on, Romans 12:13 Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home.
- I will be open for opportunities of hospitality for those in the greater community.
- I will recommend RUMC to someone. Worship services are:
  - \_\_\_\_ Live 9:00am at 833 3rd Street, Reedsburg
  - \_\_\_\_ YouTube Sunday afternoon
  - \_\_\_\_ Reedsburg TV Station 11.1 Tuesday at 3:00
- I will read/meditate on 2 Corinthians 3:1-5 in preparation for next Sunday's worship.
- I will continue to support RUMC through my prayers, presence, gifts, services, and witness.
- I will attend the remainder of the sermon series Clip In.
- I will pray the breakthrough prayer at 8:33 am & 8:33 pm:

All loving God it is by your grace we thrive.  
Continue guiding us in using your Spirit  
to boldly move us in fulfilling your purposes.  
We name it! We claim it, in Jesus' name. Amen