

## **Suggestions for the Heart**

There was a little girl who stood near a small church from which she had been turned because she was told it was too crowded. "I can't go to Sunday School," she sobbed to the Pastor as she was coming into the church. Looking down at her, he could tell by her shabby unkept appearance that the Pastor guessed the real reason why she had been turned away. He took her by the hand, took her inside and made sure she had a place in Sunday school that day. The child was so happy that the Pastor was able to find room for her in the Sunday school class that day that she went to bed that night thinking of all the children who didn't have room to come to Sunday school in that beautiful little church that she had been in just earlier that day.

Some two years later, this child lay dead in one of the poor tenements that surrounded the church. Her parents called the kind-hearted Pastor who had befriended her in order that they could make final arrangements for her funeral. As her poor little body was being moved, they found underneath it, a crumpled red purse. Inside of it, they had found some money as well. The purse itself look liked it had been gathered from a trash dump somewhere. Inside this purse they found 57 cents and a note scribbled in childish handwriting that said, "This is to help to build the little church bigger so more children can go to Sunday school."

For two years, she had saved this offering of love. When the Pastor tearfully read that note, he knew instantly what he was going to do. Carrying this note and the cracked little red purse to the pulpit, he told the story of her unselfish love and devotion. He challenged his Deacons to get busy with raising enough money to building a larger building. A newspaper learned of the story and published it. It was read by a wealthy realtor who offered a parcel of land to the church worth thousands of dollars. When he was told that the church could not pay so much, he offered to sell it to the little church for 57 cents.

Church members made large donations and checks came from far and wide. Within 5 years, the little girl's gift had a mast into a fortune of \$250,000, which was a huge amount of money at the turn of the nineteenth century. Her unselfish love had paid large incredible dividends. If you're ever in the city of Philadelphia, look up Temple Baptist Church, with a seating capacity of 3300 people. Be sure to visit Temple University where thousands of students are educated. Have a look too at the Good Samaritan Hospital, and at the Sunday School Building that houses literally hundreds of children that come there now every Sunday. It was built so that no child would be left outside because it was too crowded.

In one of the rooms in this building, you can see a picture of the sweet face of that little girl who saved 57 cents in two years, so sacrificially, yet so remarkable. Alongside of it is a picture of her kind pastor, Dr. Russell H Conwell and his book, 'Acres of Diamonds', which tell this true story about this little girl and all that happened because of how God moved upon her heart.



I share that story with you here today that you and I might be inspired by the heart of a little girl. Even in that time, 57 cents was a small sum of money. Wouldn't you agree with me that it really had absolutely nothing to do with the sum of the money but the size of her heart and the belief of heart, and the tears of her soul, that no other children like herself would be denied entry into Sunday school because it was too crowded? We know that as the Pastor look at her appearance that day, that he realized it wasn't just because Sunday school was too crowded, but because she was too shabby; maybe she smelled a little bit and she was poor. That Pastor was determined that everyone would be welcomed into that place. Her death, and her financial sacrifice, has literally brought life to thousands of people over time.

So as I begin this October with you, reflecting with you on the gift of Stewardship, as we listen to our Lord these next few weeks about how He is calling us to be more faithful in that area of our lives. I would invite you along with me to not only think of Stewardship in not only in terms of money; although that is part of it; but to begin in the most important place and that is your heart and in my heart.

In light of the story I just shared with all of us, I want to ask a very basic question for each one of us, and that is, "What does your heart need to sacrifice today?" You know often you and I give out of our abundance and there is nothing wrong with that. I am thankful for every gift you and I give to God of heart, time, talent and treasure of the abundance God has given to us. Every gift is a blessing to God and to His kingdom. But what is interesting about this little girl is she gave a gift of sacrifice. She gave a gift of all that she had. She did it willingly. She did it because she wanted other children to never ever be turned away from Sunday school. That's how much that meant to her in her heart that day.

So I ask you again and I ask myself, "What does your heart; what does my heart need to sacrifice before the Lord God Almighty on this day?"

Can I make a heart suggestion? I want to invite you to turn with me in your bulletin to the first lesson. It's the shortest scripture in our bulletin today! I bet you'll be glad to hear that! I'm going to focus on one part of this short scripture on Micah 6, it's Micah 6:8 exactly. This is my heart sharing with you today. "He has shown you O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Now there's a homework assignment from my message today. I will be honest, I will have no idea if you do the homework or not. But it is my prayer that as you and I reflect upon these few words, that we would be open to the challenge over this coming week to the homework that I believe God's spirit is giving us. To truly reflect upon this verse and not only reflect upon it but to live it out this coming week in the power of the Spirit. That the Spirit of God might teach us more deeply what it means to live out Micah 6:8 with a heart that is sacrificing and giving with joy; justice first of all.

This coming week for you, for 57 minutes (I've got to tie it all together you see!) what would justice look like for you? Is there a person that is coming in mind for you? Maybe a neighbor; maybe a beggar that you have seen driving along; maybe St. Matthew's House or Habitat, or somebody in your school. Is there someone as you think about justice that God is putting upon your heart right now to reach out to? Maybe you have upon your heart what's going on with our brothers and sisters in the Middle East right now. And maybe justice for you may be to get online and find one of your representatives and sending them an email letting them know of your concern about what is happening in this area and what justice looks like for you. Or maybe it's something completely different. But as we hear the words of the Prophet Micah today very clearly and very powerfully, one of the things that the Lord is looking for us to walk in is justice. To be just; to be just as He is just. To do the right thing; even though it might not be easy; even though it might be costly; and even though it is often uncomfortable for us and those around us.

What does it look like for you this coming week to do justice? I asked you to do one thing; whatever it might be, write it down. Think about it right now and write that down this coming week that you might be able to walk into it. Do justice! Love, kindness. Kindness is such a beautiful word, isn't it? Actually whenever I say the word kindness, it brings a smile to my face. I think of different people who have been kind to me or have been kind to my family or kind to others around me. People who are kind really stand out because they are so rare, especially in our world today! Kind people are people that powerfully touch our lives. I find it very interesting in this brief reading in Micah 6:8, it says something particular about kindness. It doesn't just say, "Do kindness.", but it says to "Love kindness".

Hmmmm....what would it look like for you this coming week for 57 minutes to love kindness? I mean to **LOVE** it. Maybe even as I say that word to some of you it's like, 'Fr. Joe, I'm not going to raise my hand right now, I'm probably not going to look at you because I don't want you to have a clue, but that word is kind of foreign to me. I don't even begin to know what kindness looks like. This is like a new focus for me.' That's great! GOOGLE it! Read about it in the Scripture today. Do a little bit of a deeper study today in Micah 6:8 about what kindness is. Begin an exploration; that can be a part of your 57 minutes!

But again, part of our call this coming week, is to begin to explore what loving kindness looks like. Is there a person that you need to be kind to? See with that person, maybe it's not about always being right. But maybe right now, the most important thing you could do with them is to be kind.

What does kindness toward yourself look like right now? Have you been beating yourself up over some things lately? Not making the grade quite like you would like to? Are you upset about that, and that's ok but what might it look like to be kind to yourself; actually cut yourself a break...like God cuts you a break all time? How in this coming week, is the Holy Spirit inviting you and me to begin to walk in kindness? I remember reading some bumper stickers from time to time on people's cars about encouraging us to engage in random acts of kindness. So I'm asking you this coming week to take some time to engage in some random acts of kindness, but especially one: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. What does that look like... to walk humbly with your God? That could look like a lot of things. I don't know about you but have you ever had the experience of physically prostrating yourself upon the ground in an attitude of prayer before God and in just doing that just laying your body out upon the ground saying to God, "God physically and in my spirit I humble myself before you in this moment." Have you ever done that before? If you have, I encourage you to do that this coming week as part of this exercise of humbling yourself before God. And then lay there for a while; just lay there for a while and listen to what God might speak to you or enjoy the moment of being humble before God; physically prostrate before him and experiencing what that's like.

It's so funny, last night I was sharing about this at the 5:00 service and as I was passing the peace, one of the parishioners who is on the verge of 90 said to me, "You know what Fr. Joe, can you give me a buy on the prostrate thing because I'm kind of old?". You know a little bit later I was sharing about that and part of the concern is if you get down in that position the question is, are you going to get back up? But we have a solution for you! But we have a solution that came out of the 5:00 service last night and I'm speaking it to you right now! If that's a concern of yours, do it on your bed. Isn't that great?! Give it up for the 5pm service! They came up with that. Do it on your bed, but if you're going to do it on your bed, start on your face and then roll back over...that will count. The things that come up in Naples, I tell ya!

One of the interesting things that come up as we physically humble ourselves before God it can powerfully effect our spirit, I found that to be true. So I invite you to do that this coming week, to bow before the Lord God Almighty and humble yourself before Him. What else might humility look like for you and me? What about listening to the last thing that God spoke to heart that you haven't listened to yet. You know exactly what that is. You've been trying to push that out of your mind ever since it came in but it keeps coming back. Let me say that God's word to you and that sense of God's direction to you will keep coming back until you listen. And so let me save you some time; you've got 57 minutes this week! It will take you just one of those minutes this week to say, "You know what, Father I bend the knee before you. And I'm going to humble myself before you." And do that. Don't want to. Don't like it. I just want you to have my 57 cents about it!

But I'm going to humble myself before you. What would it look like to do that in the area of sin that you've been struggling with? You know that sin that has you by the throat and won't let go, and you've been trying to work through it for years and it is still there? Join me this week humbling yourself before the Lord in saying, "Lord I come before you in all humility; this sin has me beat, but it doesn't have you beat. Help...I need Your help". And as you and I begin to walk humbly with our God in that way let me just say to you, you may feel alone in your sin. You may feel like the only one struggling with it. But let me just say that whatever it might be, you will be surprised with how many other people, even within just this congregation, are struggling with the same thing; whether you are a man or a woman, you would be surprised. You are not alone.

And as you and I begin to walk in this to do justice, to do kindness and to walk humbly with our God, what can begin to happen for us this coming week is a transformation of our heart. And I just want to say that it is my deep belief that this is where true stewardship starts. That is where it all begins. It begins in the relationship of our heart to Almighty God and to one another.

So that is the invitation to you and me this day; that is our homework this coming week. I would just encourage us as we hear this story of this little child who sacrificially gave all that she could in love and for others. I believe what God is asking for you and for me at the beginning of this month is the same thing: the gift of your life. He doesn't want anything more or less than the gift of your life. And I am so grateful that you are here today to hear this. Wherever you are, whatever you have been doing; however far you have been running from God; you can stop today and begin to sacrificially give him the gift of your life. The gift of your heart and see what God will do.

Fr. Joe Maiocco



**Temple Baptist University**