

Good morning to all those who are blessed by God,

**SCRIPTURE:**

Isaiah 53:2-6 (MSG) – Larger reading: Isaiah 53:1-12

*“The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum. But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed. We’re all like sheep who’ve wandered off and gotten lost. We’ve all done our own thing, gone our own way.”*

**STORY:**

Here is another Christmas parable. This one is entitled, “THE DINNER GUEST” and the author is unknown. Enjoy and have a joy-filled very merry Christmas:

All Ruth had for mail that day was a single letter. She picked it up, looking at the back and the front of the envelope as she noticed there was something odd. There was no stamp, no postmark, only her name and address. With a little curiosity, she opened the letter and read:

*Dear Ruth,* [L][L][SEP]

*I'm going to be in your neighborhood Saturday afternoon and I'd like to stop by for a visit.* [L][L][SEP]

*Love Always,* [L][L][L][L][SEP] *Jesus* [L][L][L][L][SEP]

Her hands were shaking as she placed the letter on the table. "Why would the Lord want to visit me? I'm nobody special. I don't have anything to offer."

As if to confirm that thought, Ruth remembered her empty kitchen cabinets. "Oh my goodness, I really don't have anything to offer. I'll have to run down to the store and buy something for dinner." She reached for her purse and counted out its contents. Five dollars and forty cents. "Well, I can get some bread and cold cuts, at least."

She threw on her coat and hurried out the door. [L][L][L][L][SEP] She bought a loaf of French bread, a half-pound of sliced turkey, and a carton of milk.

Leaving Ruth with a grand total of twelve cents to last her until Monday. Nonetheless, she felt satisfied as she headed home, her meager offerings tucked under her arm. [L][L][L][L][SEP]

"Hey lady, can you help us, lady?" Ruth was startled to see two figures huddled in the alleyway near the store. She had been so absorbed in her dinner plans she had not noticed a man and a woman, dressed in little more than rags looked up at her.

"Lady, I ain't got no job and my wife and I have been living out here on the street, and, well, now it's getting cold and we're getting kinda of hungry and, well, if you could help us, ma'am, we'd really appreciate it."

The man looked sheepishly at Ruth. [L T L]  
[SEP:SEP] Ruth looked at them both. They were dirty, they smelled bad and, frankly, she thought that they could get some kind of work if they really wanted to.

"I'd really like to help you, but I'm poor myself. All I have is a few cold cuts and some bread, and I'm having an important guest for dinner tonight and I was planning on serving that to Him." The man said in a resigned tone, "Yeah, well, OK lady, I understand. Thanks anyway."

The man put his arm around the woman's shoulders, turned and together, they headed back into the shadows of the alley. [L T L]  
[SEP:SEP] As she watched them leave, Ruth felt a familiar twinge in her heart.

"Hey! wait!" The couple stopped and turned as she ran down the alley after them. "Look, why don't you take this food. I'll figure out something else to serve my guest." She handed the man her grocery bag. "Thank you lady. Thank you very much!" The woman smiled softly, "Yes, thank you!" [L T L]  
[SEP:SEP]

Ruth could see now that woman was shivering. "You know, I've got another coat at home. Here, why don't you take this one." Ruth unbuttoned her jacket and slipped it over the woman's shoulders. Then smiling, she turned and walked back to the street... without her coat and with nothing to serve her guest. As she turned the corner, she heard the couple say once again, "Thanks again Ma'am!" [L T L]  
[SEP:SEP]

Ruth was chilled by the time she reached her front door, and worried too. The Lord was coming to visit and she didn't have anything to offer Him. She fumbled through her purse for the door key. As she glanced down, she noticed another envelope in her mail slot. "Well, That's strange. The mailman doesn't usually come twice in one day."

Entering her house, she dropped the groceries on a near by table and opened the letter. [L T L]  
[SEP:SEP]

Dear Ruth, [L T L]  
[SEP:SEP]

It was so good to see you again. Thank you for the lovely meal. And thank you, too, for the beautiful coat. [L T L]  
[SEP:SEP]

Love Always, [L][L][L]  
[SEP][SEP]

Jesus [L][L][L]  
[SEP][SEP]

The air was still cold, but even without her coat, Ruth no longer noticed. [L][L]  
[SEP]

### **REFLECTION:**

On FaceBook I post a morning inspirational thought. Last week I shared: “If God knocked at your door would you recognize him?” I think that is a legitimate question. We have our built in expectation as to what Jesus would look like. We’ve seen the pictures, haven’t we? And yet ...

Actually we don’t need a photo of Jesus in order to recognize him because he shared a simple truth: “As you have done it unto the least of these... you have done it unto me.” (Matthew 25:40-45). So what does Jesus look like?

Just look into the face of the person who is hungry; into the face of the homeless standing on the street corner; into the face of a child; into the person who is sick and dying. We have seen his face when we look upon the illegal immigrant in our country; those dying of Covid; the grieving widow or widower. The face of Jesus is all the shades of the rainbow and more. It is also seen in the alcoholic, smelly, individual sleeping in the doorway. The face of Jesus also speaks many different languages and worships in a wide range of styles.

Just remember, as Ruth in our parable discovered, as you have done something to the least of these people who have been pushed to the margins and disenfranchised by our society you are doing it to Jesus.

Yes, Jesus is going to be in our neighborhood this Christmas and he probably will be knocking at our doors ... will we open them and greet him with the love that we hold for our Savior even if he doesn’t fit the image of our expectation?

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim  
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***There is now a waiting list for the Christmas Eve Service. If you have made a reservation and discover that you can’t make it to the service please call the church office by Wednesday, noon. Thank you.***