

Will Somebody Say, "Amen?"

Memory recalls that I inquired at the school office to see if I could get a substitute for the afternoon. My intent was to take half day's personal leave. Although it was pouring down rain I made arrangements to pick up my two-year-old grandson from daycare so that we could scoot off to the mall in Raleigh. We found a space on the lower level parking deck where I buckled Jonathan into his stroller for the ride inside. While heading across the lot towards the elevator I spotted some money on the pavement. Greenbacks just lying there caused an unexpected flow of adrenalin. There were four twenty dollar bills folded twice; do the math. Eighty dollars. Wow! What to do? Turn it over to security? Take it to customer service? Just count it as a treasure trove and spend it? None of these options was satisfying.

Both Grands, Gra'ma and Grandson, rolled in and out of stores, looked at window displays, purchased a small inflatable pool, and enjoyed ice cream cones before making the return trip home with windshield wipers still going. Newfound green bills were creased in my purse calling out for a subjective assignment for my English students the next day. (The sophomoric entries addressing the degree of responsibility of the one who dropped that money and the choices for ways to spend eighty dollars would merit another telling.)

Greetings from a former schoolmate brought the announcement that Mrs. Isley's household and personal belongings were scheduled for auction on Friday night. Mrs. Isley, a longtime member of Jonesboro United Methodist Church, had been my high school English and math teacher who had instilled in me Christian principles that still carry me on my faith journey. When I became a teacher myself it was with the promise of commitment to carry her spirit into my own classroom.



At the auction I purchased her thimbles, which I reckoned to be small chalices to remind me of communion with her, and the mahogany bed which had been hers since she was married, some sixty years before. The bed went for eighty dollars; the thimbles were priceless. Somehow deep in the recesses of my being I wondered if Mrs. Isley had arranged for those four twenties to bless my rainy afternoon earlier that week.

As blessings would have it, a friend broke up housekeeping choosing to move to a retirement village where she stayed until opting to move to an apartment. Kate Isley's bed had been stored at my house until my friend received it at her new residence. This friend had for many years been a missionary to the Latino people in south Texas before coming to North Carolina to teach. Actually I received a call to missions when I was just sixteen years old, shortly after Mrs. Isley had been my teacher. Convinced that my call was to foreign missions, after college graduation I entered Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth where I prepared to answer God's call.

Sometimes, as my Sunday School teacher so aptly phrased it, God writes straight with crooked lines. My missionary journey took a turn when the call for me to go and serve became a call to stay and serve. So I taught school for thirty-one plus years, most of which were in the same hometown high school from which I graduated. During some of those years Mrs. Isley was still teaching in the same school system. When she retired I made it a practice to send her flowers on the opening day of school.

Years have passed. Now I am retired. Prevenient grace, like falling rain, continues to go before me. My passion for missions has in the past two years led me to become involved with the Hispanic population in our area, especially those in a small congregation which called itself La Trinidad. Members of that body of worshippers and those in the Jonesboro United Methodist Church are meeting at the same hour with intentions of weaving together as one. Pentecost Sunday will be a day of invitation for our Latino friends to join the body at JUMC, Praise the Lord!

Lee County churches have organized and operate a Christians United Outreach Center where clients are interviewed and approved for receiving free food weekly. On occasions when the center is closed for holidays or other reasons food stands a chance of spoiling, therefore might be thrown away. Months ago, on the days they were closed, I started loading up my van with parcels of food which I began taking to families in need,

some of which were members of La Trinidad, but most of which lived in Pine Village, a community of people who came to our area from Mexico. Blanca Hercilla, a Spanish speaking friend from Peru, accompanied me making contacts by phone before we arrived with food. We make a good team. Our list of contacts has grown long.

One day in late December when my van was loaded with food I added some of the Poinsettias which were left around the altar after Christmas. While I was at the church I asked our pastors to come out to the parking lot to bless the food and the mission. At Pine Village we received twice a blessing seeing the glow in a Mexican woman's eyes as she walked away with a bag of food in one hand and clutching a poinsettia close to her heart in the other. It was like she was holding a piece of home. (The poinsettia is the flower of Mexico.) Thank you, Lord.

Our Associate Pastor, Rev. Patricia Sykes, was moved by the mission. When she called me an apostle, *she gave me wheels!* It was she who cased an application to be sent to the Sanford District Lay Rally lifting this mission as the Lay Ministry of the Year. It was called Beyond the Walls. God showed us His glory when we were named the recipients of the district award. All praise to Him!

The news is out! Now I receive clothes which children have outgrown to share with other children. The Fellowship Sunday School Class provided enough school supplies to make and distribute twenty-seven gift bags to Hispanic children. Most recently a mother in our church asked if I could place twin beds where they would be needed. She committed to buying new springs and mattresses to meet the need. My friend from Peru and I found a family with two children who had never had beds of their own before. The mother, Jinger Gibson, along with her adopted daughter, Amber, donated the furniture, delivered and set up the beds. It was a joy to see the Anglo child and the Latino child making up the beds together.

Listen up, now! A few weeks later a beautiful eleven-year-old Hispanic girl asked if I could find *her* a bed. I told her I would try, all the while looking to heaven wondering how. Glenda lives with two sisters, Norma and Sylvia, a little brother, Eric, and her parents, Maria and Antonio; they are from San Salvador. The children treat me like their grandmother.

Only days after this request was made, my missionary friend from Texas, whom I mentioned earlier, has to move out of her apartment to an assisted care facility because she had a stroke which resulted in other complications. *Mrs. Isley's bed is mine again!* Are you still reading? I went to Glenda's house and asked her to show me where she would put a bed if I got one. A door was opened to an empty room. Now show where you have been sleeping. Then I saw the bed in which the three sisters had been sleeping together. I promised to be there with a bed two days later, Joel Cameron, a man of God in our church, helped me load and unload the bed, a folding table, two chairs, a nightstand, and a mirror.

There was jubilation that day on Academy Street (so named because of our church, which is on Main and Academy, started out as an academy years ago. Two sisters had a new bed complete with bedding and a colorful spread with curtains that complimented it. Of course there were just as many windows in this bedroom as there were in the apartment from which they came! We set up a card table and two chairs so the girls would have a place to do some home work. Before I could get the hooks up to hold the floor length mirror on the closet door, three-year-old Eric and his mother, who is going to school with him to learn English, were sitting at the table reciting the ABC's together. Oh, my goodness! You should have been there. Soon all of us were singing the alphabet together.

I just couldn't help myself; when everything was in place I went to the church where I found Pastor Pat in the parking lot fixing to leave. I asked if she would come with me to have a prayer with the family who received the bed. She was already late for something. "Please come. If you don't, you will miss a blessing." No contest; she followed me two blocks to the house. The whole Benetiz family gathered with us for prayer in that bedroom. What a blessing! That prayer was twice prayer! Folks, we did not close with "Blest Be The Tie That Binds." Our benediction was a joyful rendering of the English alphabet. Somebody say, "Amen!"

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