
“... you said we couldn't be sure of getting another chance to straighten things out with God.”

to do and nowhere in particular to go. At least he could sit here in comfort. You could see Paul most any time on the street, standing on a corner, sitting on a step or on a park bench, or rummaging in a garbage can. He was a regular customer at the Sally Ann and the CPR station. If he wasn't on the street, he was mooching a drink in a bar. Sunday nights he was in the mission, just sitting, waiting for that hot cup of coffee and stale doughnut. He would hold the hymn book with a pious air, feigning participation in the singing, but it was a well known fact that he had never learned to read. At the end of the service, he would crack an ear-to-ear toothless grin and grunt a few words "Hello Henry, good service," and shuffle out. I sometimes wondered where he would be spending the night.

His clothes were filthy beyond describing. It was obvious he was sleeping under a loading dock or culvert, or in an empty train car. He carried his entire life's possessions in one shopping bag and would always drop an extra doughnut or two into his bag, as they were being passed around. He always wore the same flannel shirt, which at

one time had been a checkered blue, and now had a two tone collar - grimy black on the outside, and ebony black on the inside. The top button on his pants was missing, and he had replaced its function with a fancy drapery cord. Without a doubt, his pants had never been washed. He had worn them for untold years and obviously slept in them as well.

On one occasion, I inquired regarding his next of kin, whether or not he had ever had a family, had he ever had a vocation, could I provide him with a change of clothing, etc. He showed obvious annoyance at my intrusive meddling and prying questions, so I never bothered him again.

Frequently someone would give me a bag of clothes to take to the mission. The back door was more accessible, and so on this particular occasion, I drove down the lane to unload at the rear door. Paul was sitting on the step and greeted me with his ear-to-ear toothless grin. Beside him was a loaf of bread and a fist-full of raw bacon. He had obviously found these goodies in the City Meat's garbage can. Paul had only one tooth, and he was fighting a losing battle with the bacon. With only one tooth, chewing raw bacon was an endless if not an impossible task. The bread was as brittle as china crystal and shattered into minute fragments each time he broke off a piece.

"Hi Paul, fancy meeting you here in the middle of the week. Come on in, I'll find you something easier to eat. You will lose that last tooth you've got eating that bread - concrete would be softer,

and that bacon can very well make you sick. Perhaps I can find you something you can enjoy. Lets see if Frank's got some soup on the back burner.

I rang the bell, but no one answered. We waited, and while we waited, Paul surprised me by striking up a conversation. He referred to the message I had spoken on the Sunday night, "Henry, you said we couldn't be sure of getting another chance to straighten things out with God." I had expressed the thought, that perhaps the invitation given Sunday night, could very well be the last opportunity for some. No one could be guaranteed another. "Correct Paul, so you did hear what was preached Sunday evening!"

He had given up on his raw bacon and petrified bread, rolled them into a dirty paper spread on the pavement, and threw the package into the weeds growing against the building. "Have you ever given God an opportunity in your life, Paul?" He was looking down at the asphalt, pondering a reply. He was not the talkative kind. I waited. I was amazed he had initiated a dialogue. He continued quietly without looking up. "God gave me another chance last Sunday night." How strange a remark! I waited again, but he volunteered no more. I did feel however, that there was something more he wanted to say. Perhaps a little prodding would help. "Tell me about it Paul." He took his time. "Down at the bottom of Alexander, God gave me another chance." He had me curious. "How did God give you another chance Paul?" This was perhaps the longest

“I could sense that whatever Paul had experienced, had dramatically and profoundly affected him.”

conversation he had ever engaged in. "I will show you if you want to see." This time he looked up at me for an answer. "I sure do Paul, show me." He wanted to take me to Alexander, an avenue that ran to the river.

He accepted my invitation to drive there and he got into the car. We drove to the corner of Lilly and Alexander, and continued on foot to the river's edge. Debris was everywhere. Old boots, tires, beer bottles, whiskey bottles, wine bottles, rubbing alcohol bottles, lysol bottles, even shopping carts littered the area. Old mattresses and sheets of cardboard scattered among the weeds were tell-tale that many were spending their nights here. The very atmosphere reeked of corruption, squalor, depravity, decay - an area of booze, drugs and illicit sex.

Paul led me down a path along the river about 100 yards and stopped at a pile of poplar logs. Some had avalanched into the river, and were lodged in the mud in a dishevelled mess. He pointed at these logs, and in a perturbed and grave tone spoke, "There, God gave me another chance,

*"Did you say,
Thank You God
for giving me one more
chance?"*

over there." I wanted to be sure I was getting the right message. I selected one of the bigger logs, "Paul, come and sit here. Now tell me, how did God give you another chance? Make me understand."

I could sense that whatever Paul had experienced, had dramatically and profoundly affected him. I was patient and waited for him to speak. He took his time, finally, almost painfully, he rambled a reply. "After I walk away from the mission, I wonder if God ever give me another chance. I wonder very hard. I come here to sleep on the logs and I wonder long time. Some other guys come and climb on the logs to sleep, and the logs start rolling and they roll down into the water, and some fly over my head, and some roll over me, and some logs make me roll down too, and when it all stop, I get up at the bottom in the water and find no hurt, no bruise, I don't find nothing. I know some guys hurt very much, two dead. Maybe some still missing. Police find Dan in the water, drowned, and when I get up I know God give me another chance."

"Paul, have you thanked God for giving you another chance? Did you say,

Thank You God for giving me one more chance?" Did you say Sorry to God for all your sinning, and did you ask Jesus to be your Saviour?" Without hesitation, Paul spoke with a surety which was a joy to hear. "Sure I thank God. I tell him Sorry and I know he forgive me. I said, Thank You for saving me on these logs, and for dying for me, and forgiving me, and for saving me for ever and for giving me one more chance."

I was suddenly unaware of the pungent odor of this unkempt individual, and totally ignored his offensive filth. I placed an arm around him, perhaps the only arm that had ever been placed around him in genuine love, and assured him of God's wonderful mercy and abiding love. His exterior was filthy beyond words, but I knew the Lord had cleansed him on the inside. He had passed from death unto life - from sinner to saint - from a derelict to a child of the King, from an outcast to one "accepted in the beloved". When I made my departure, he gave me another great big ear-to-ear toothless grin, beautiful beyond compare, and which I'm looking forward to seeing again one day - in heaven.

Dear Reader,

Union Gospel Mission opens the door to every one who asks for help. Approximately 300 come every day. Entire families are coming. Hungry and frightened children are coming. The homeless, hungry, destitute and abused - all are welcome and are given food, clothing, tender loving care and the message that God loves them, died for them, and is reaching out to them with his salvation in Christ.

Due to the recession and the "slow" summer months, Union Gospel Mission is making this special appeal. We have cut staff, cut the salaries of remaining staff, cut costs in every conceivable way, and are still in a deficit position. Our policy is to operate on the means that God provides, but we have fallen a month behind.

Would you be able and willing to send the mission an extra gift, so that we can start the month of October in the black? We would be exceedingly glad and grateful and would praise the Lord with shouts of joy that would ring right across the province. In anticipation of your faithfulness, we thank you sincerely.

This is my Special Emergency Gift
to liquidate UGM debt.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POSTAL CODE _____

Thank you for... "joining in helping us through
your prayers." *2 Cor. 1:11*

Union Gospel Mission

Box 1073

Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 2X4

or call 943-9904

320 Princess Street



The bars were closed Sunday nights. That meant that the mission would be full. The regulars would be there. George, Mike, Bob, Andy, Jake and Paul would all be sitting in their usual spots. Paul had been a regular since day one. I often wondered if he understood, or even cared to understand what was preached from the pulpit. He always sat on the left, half way down, against the wall. Regardless of the weather, he was sure to be there when the doors opened. There was nothing else for him